

The Monstrous in Shakespeare
by
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Abstract

This thesis argues that the view of human nature which emerges from Shakespeare's plays is essentially hybrid, protean and metamorphic. Chapter I discusses various early modern theories of the self and subsequent chapters explore the transforming power of love, twins and other doubles, transvestite heroines, the relationship between actor and role and the various forms of the monstrous in *The Tempest*. The plays considered include early, middle and late works and examples of comedy, tragedy, history and romance.

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Introduction

The original inspiration for this thesis was an engraving by the sixteenth-century artist, Bernard Saloman, depicting the metamorphosis of Actaeon. It shows the hero equipped like a hunter with spear and hounds, but with his head already transformed into that of a stag. The image is curiously disturbing, at once horrifying and pathetic, threatening and ridiculous, utterly strange and yet recognisably human.

At the time when I first came across this picture, the media were full of stories which, like the figure of Actaeon, seemed to challenge accepted ideas about what constitutes a human person; discoveries in the field of genetics, transgenic organ transplants, the possibility of cloning, the development of artificial intelligence and the exploration of the nature of consciousness all raised the questions: what is the essence of humanity and what distinguishes one human individual from another?

In the plays of Shakespeare I found a number of characters who also seemed to explore the limits of human individuality; identical twins, androgynous heroines, a fat knight with antlers, a weaver with an ass' head and, above all, the strange anomalous figure of Caliban all called into question the nature of human personality and the idea of a fixed, consistent "self".

In this thesis, the term, "monstrous", is used to describe such transgressive, ambivalent figures. Paradoxically, however, I argue that in this context the

monstrous is not unnatural but an essential feature of human nature, and it is my contention that this perception is Shakespeare's contribution to the redefinition of the self which was taking place during the early modern period. Where I draw parallels between Shakespeare's plays and other classical or contemporary works, I do not claim that in every case he necessarily had first-hand knowledge of the putative source text. I merely assume an acquaintance with certain seminal ideas which were current at the time. However, I think it is reasonable to accept Stanley Wells' conclusion that "having acquired a good grounding in the classics at school, Shakespeare also managed at some point to develop at least a reading knowledge of French and Italian, and throughout his life must have kept up his reading of English and continental literature".¹

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter I considers the various theories of human nature current in Shakespeare's lifetime and each subsequent chapter addresses one of the forms of the monstrous explored in the plays: the transforming effects of erotic love, individuality and duality, confusions of gender, the relationship between actor and role and the various forms of monstrosity to be found in *The Tempest*. The works considered include examples of comedy, tragedy, history and romance and cover all the stages of Shakespeare's dramatic career. Every chapter begins with a detailed examination of a particular moment in one play and then proceeds to a consideration of other relevant texts, which open out and extend the argument. Before each chapter I have inserted an extract from a twentieth or twenty-first century work which touches on the subject to be discussed. These

¹Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life*, (London : Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p14.

interpolations do not contribute directly to my main argument; rather they are intended to establish a dialogue between Shakespeare's world and our own as each addresses itself to such problematic issues as the nature of consciousness, the meaning of identity and the limits of the human.

The nature of my topic inevitably entails an eclectic approach and I have made use of a wide variety of sources. However, a number of works have been particularly useful in helping me to frame my argument. I found Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid* both illuminating and inspiring, and I have adopted his technique of finding mythological parallels to Shakespearean characters and situations, though my terms of reference extend beyond the *Metamorphoses*. *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* by Edgar Wind, *Studies in Iconology* by Erwin Panofsky and A. Bartlett Giamatti's essay, *Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance* were invaluable sources of evidence for Renaissance uses of mythology in literature and iconography. *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* by Stephen Greenblatt shed light on the emergence of early modern theories of the self and Jonas Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* outlined the philosophical background to these theories. On the vexed question of the probable extent of Shakespeare's learning I am indebted to the work of John Erskin Hankins who, in *Background of Shakespeare's Thought*, has painstakingly traced to their origins the allusions to contemporary science and philosophy in Shakespeare's plays. Though the conclusions derived from such investigations are necessarily speculative, and some of Hankins' parallels seem rather strained, his study sets the plays in their intellectual and cultural

cultural context and he is scrupulous in pointing out that he is concerned with backgrounds, not sources, that is with works which Shakespeare may have known in part or indirectly, an example which I have been at pains to follow. Finally, Leslie A. Fiedler's *The Stranger in Shakespeare* is also concerned with Shakespeare's exploration of "the limits of the human" and I have found some of his ideas challenging and stimulating, though his examples of such marginal figures – the woman, the Moor, the "native" and the Jew – are different from mine and, in relating the plays to the Sonnets in search of Shakespeare's "personal mythology", Fiedler's approach and his conclusions differ widely from my own.

All Shakespearean quotations, unless otherwise identified, are from the Oxford Shakespeare edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery. Biblical quotations are from the King James Bible.

I

A good deal of the recent scientific work on consciousness has stressed its essentially narrative character. Antonio Damasio, for instance, in his book *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion, and the Making of Consciousness*, lays great emphasis on this [:------]. Human consciousness, as Damasio makes clear, is self-consciousness. We not only have experiences, we are conscious of ourselves having them, and of being affected by them. He draws attention to the paradox noted by William James, that “the self in our stream of consciousness changes continuously as it moves forward in time, even as we retain a sense that the self remains the same while our existence continues”. Damasio calls the self that is constantly modified the “core” self, and the self that seems to have a kind of continuous existence the “autobiographical” self, suggesting that it is like a literary production. “Whether we like the notion or not,” he says, “something like the sense of self does exist in the human mind as we go about knowing things[; ---] the human mind is constantly being split [---] between the part that stands for the known and the part that stands for the knower”.

David Lodge: *Consciousness and the Novel*

Chapter I

The Monstrous Self: Hybrids, Proteans and Metamorphs

In Act I Scene ii of *Hamlet*, the Prince's fellow students, prompted by Claudius and Gertrude, try to ambush him into revealing the reason for what the King calls his 'transformation'. [*Hamlet* 2.25] Unable to betray the immediate cause, not merely 'his father's death and [the Queen's] o'er hasty marriage' [*Hamlet* 2.2.57] but also the encounter with the ghost, the revelation of Claudius' crime and the terrible burden of avenging it, Hamlet relates his malaise to a more general existential unease, arising from a sense of the contradictions inherent in human nature:

I have of late – but whereof I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire – why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god – the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? [*Hamlet* 2.2. 296-310]

The Cambridge editor claims that this speech should be 'discount[ed] as an index to Hamlet's feelings', asserting that it is no more than a 'glorious blind, a flight of rhetoric by which a divided and distressed soul conceals the true

nature of his distress and substitutes a formal and conventional state of *Weltschmerz*'.² Clearly the Prince's avowed ignorance of the cause of his unhappiness is disingenuous. However, I would argue that, like his assumed 'antic disposition', [*Hamlet* 15. 173] this speech may reveal as much as it conceals about Hamlet's true state of mind. We know from elsewhere in the play – the 'to be not to be' soliloquy, for example [*Hamlet* 3.1. 58-90] - that he tends to see his own problems in the light of universal human experience, 'the thousand natural shocks/that flesh is heir to'. [*Hamlet* 3.1. 64-65] Michael Pennington, who played the role in John Barton's 1980 production at Stratford, sees this speech as an attempt to provide a philosophical context for the protagonist's awareness of human potentiality and human corruption:

Historically, the speech resounded with a keenly-felt conflict between Renaissance idealism and the debasing discord of the age; for us its attraction is its [---] heartfelt lucidity in acknowledging men as simultaneously close to the gods and the worms – it opens up a new range for the play in which humans will travel from bestiality to divinity and back.³

'Heartfelt' expression of a personal vision or 'glorious blind', the speech clearly provides an arresting image of man's unique place in the universe, midway between the angels and beasts, godlike intellect yoked to animal physicality, poised, metaphorically as well as literally, between the heavens and the earth.

² Philip Edwards ed., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1985), Introduction p.47.

³ Michael Pennington, *Hamlet – A User's Guide* (London: 1996), p.71.

On the stage of the Globe theatre, these lines would have gained a peculiar resonance from the physical environment in which they were spoken. The platform on which the actor playing Hamlet stood would have been constructed on a timber 'frame' and projected into the theatre-yard like a 'promontory'. As Bruce Smith has pointed out, 'experience in the reconstructed Globe in London has demonstrated that [---] an actor [---] commands the greatest *acoustical* power near the geometric centre of the space beneath the [stage] canopy'.⁴ As the dominant character in the scene, Hamlet would presumably occupy this space; thus, in a neat transposition of vehicle and tenor, the character's figurative 'roof' (the sky) would become the actor's actual roof, known in the theatrical jargon of the day as the 'heavens'. 'Fretted' refers to a technique used by contemporary plasterers and, according to Keenan and Davidson, 'gilded stars--- were nailed or painted upon the ceilings in chambers decorated with celestial scenes'.⁵ Indeed Theobalds, the great 'prodigy house' built by William Cecil, boasted 'a ceiling adorned with a sun that was moved by machinery, and stars which, after dark, shone and twinkled'.⁶ John Orrel suggests that the Globe 'heavens' may have been decorated in a similar, though less extravagant, style, 'possibly [---] with some sort of cosmic or zodiacal theme'.⁷

⁴ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.213-214.

⁵ Siobhan Keenan and Peter Davidson, 'The Iconography of the Globe' in *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt* ed. by J R Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.147-156 p.149.

⁶ David Cecil, *The Cecils of Hatfield House* (London: Book Club Associates (by arrangement with Constable, 1973), (p.129.)

⁷ Andrew Gurr with John Orrel, *Rebuilding the Globe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989), p.117.

The physical context of the speech, then, both reinforces its meaning and relates it directly to the audience's experience. Even more significant, however, is its intellectual context. As I hope to show, as well as the 'Renaissance idealism' identified by Michael Pennington, Hamlet's words also draw upon a view of human nature rooted in scripture and in a mediaeval model of the universe based on the works of Plato and Aristotle as interpreted by Augustine and Aquinas. The abrupt descent from eulogy to bathos in the concluding phrase, with its echo of the old rite for Ash Wednesday –

'remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return' – has the same source as Beatrice's witty objection to matrimony: 'Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?' [*Much Ado About Nothing* 1.3. 54-57].

There is an oblique reference here to the Pauline injunction, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord'. [*Ephesians* 5.22] but the principle source for these lines, as for Hamlet's speech, lies in two passages from *Genesis*: 'so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' [*Genesis* 1.27], and 'and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'. [*Genesis* 2.7]

According to this model, man is an anomaly, 'the apex of earthly creation'⁸ yet 'a little lower than the angels' [*Psalms* 8.5], 'the lynchpin of the universe

⁸ Julia Briggs, *This Stage-Play World : English Literature and its Background 1580 – 1625* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.24.

bending its two great provinces of matter and spirit together.’⁹ As such, in the terms of this thesis, he is monstrous, a creature with a dual nature, half angel and half beast, engaged in a life-long struggle to reconcile the two halves of his being until ‘the dust [shall] return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto the God who gave it.’ [*Ecclesiasticus* 12.7]. Hamlet’s celebration of ‘apprehension’ and ‘action’ alludes to the two principal functions of the soul, which Aquinas calls ‘the speculative or image-making power and the active or practical power,’¹⁰ faculties which can themselves be at war. So Hamlet, reproaching himself for delay in avenging his father’s murder and musing on the uniquely human capacity for ‘looking before and after’ [*Hamlet*, Cambridge 4.4.37] wonders whether his failure to act is caused by this very habit ‘of thinking too precisely on the event’ [*Hamlet*, Cambridge 4.4.41].

The idea of the self which emerges from this model is deeply problematic: on the one hand it is radically divided, on the other it is created in the image of a God who, in contemporary numerology, is ‘the unitie from which all number proceedeth’.¹¹ How, then, can man fully reflect this divine image? A possible solution to this riddle was provided by moralists such as Hooker, who enjoined human beings to accept their place in the natural order like the rest of creation:

⁹ W.R.D. Moseley, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: ‘Richard II’ to ‘Henry V’* (London: Penguin, 1988), p.12.

¹⁰ John Erskine Hankins, *Backgrounds of Shakespeare’s Thought* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978), p.104.

¹¹ La Primaudaye, *The French Academie* quoted in Hankins, p.639.

If the moon should wander from her beaten way [---] the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain [---] the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief: what would become of man himself, whom these things now all serve?¹²

Nature obeys God's laws by necessity; man, endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, should do so by choice, conforming his will to the will of God and thus embodying a faithful image of his Maker. A striking symbol of this conformity is afforded by the lodge built by Sir Thomas Tresham on his Northamptonshire estate to house his warrender. It is a triangular structure, three stories high, with three gables and three windows on each side, the latter 'composed of groups of three units, triangles in threes within trefoil frames, or trefoils alone'¹³. The chimney is three-sided and the entablature frieze, which is thirty-three feet long, bears an inscription on each side, each containing thirty-three letters, whilst over the door there is a trefoil-shaped plaque with the motto, 'Tres testimonium dant'. This architectural fantasy celebrates the conformity between the Trinity and Sir Thomas' identity, represented by a mathematical pun on his name – *Tres*-ham – and his family emblem, the trefoil. It also illustrates Sir Henry Wootton's dictum, 'all art was then in its perfection, when it might be reduced to some natural principle.'¹⁴ The principle which dominates the design of Tresham's lodge is the constancy of numbers compared with 'the change and flux of the physical world',¹⁵ the fact that 'no matter what material objects they are applied to, the twoness of 2

¹² Hooker, "Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" quoted in Briggs, p.24.

¹³ John Buxton, *Elizabethan Taste* (London: Macmillan, 1963; repr. with minor alterations 1965), p.59.

¹⁴ Buxton, p.34.

¹⁵ Hankins, p.67.

and the threeness of 3 are always the same'.¹⁶ As well as demonstrating 'the threeness of three', however, in its fidelity to a single 'natural principle' and its perfect conformity between concept and form the lodge represents a unity which is not merely an aesthetic ideal but a reflection of the Platonic idea of God as 'one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image'.¹⁷

A similar aspiration towards total self-consistency is to be found in Queen Elizabeth I's motto, *semper eadem*, and her emblem, the Phoenix, the significance of which is explained by John Steadman: 'truth is one like the Phoenix, *unica et semper eadem*, while error is manifold and multiform.'¹⁸ The Phoenix is not only 'ever the same' in that it is unchanging; it is also the same *as itself*, in that it is one of a kind. Thus it symbolises both constancy and consistency. This, too, was Platonic concept, as Niall Rudd points out:

Plato [----] quotes the saying, 'Bad men are never the same and never consistent' (*Lepis* 214c). The proverb suited the philosopher's teaching, for an inconsistent man lacked that steady, rational control which unified the personality and fitted it for the good life.¹⁹

Polonius' advice to his son echoes the same sentiments:

Thus above all – to thine one self be true,
and it must follow, as the night the day,

¹⁶ Hankins, p.67.

¹⁷ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.17.

¹⁸ John Steadman, *Nature into Myth: Medieval and Renaissance Moral Symbols* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979), p.40.

¹⁹ Niall Rudd, *The Satires of Horace*, pb. edn. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), p.27.

thou canst not then be false to any man.
[Hamlet 1.3. 78-80]

This is the voice of Elizabethan orthodoxy. In his study of *King Lear*, John Danby explains how, for conservative philosophers such as Hooker, truth to oneself was equated with obedience to the law of nature:

We think of natural law as exerting a kind of mechanical necessity. Mechanical necessity did not trouble the Elizabethans. The cosmos was not yet seen as a machine [---]. Each creature, on the contrary, under God, was a self-maintaining 'this'. It was not part of a machine. Rather, it was an intelligence observing its rightful place in a community. What held it in place and held the community together was Reason. The law it observed was felt more as self-expression than as external restraint. It was a law, in any case, which the creature was most itself when it obeyed [---] and rebellion against this law was rebellion against oneself, loss of all nature, lapse into chaos.²⁰

Reason enables man to be true to his nature by controlling his passions. When Prospero is tempted to give way to his vengeful impulses he says '---with my nobler reason' 'gainst my fury/Do I take part'. [*The Tempest* 5.1. 26-27] Reason is 'nobler' than fury because it is the faculty which distinguishes mankind from the beasts. When man's animal nature overbears the 'steady, rational control' which, according to Niall Rudd, 'unifie[s] the personality', the consequent 'lapse into chaos' gives rise to the state of psychic disorientation experienced by Macbeth driven by ambition to contemplate the crime of regicide:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

²⁰ John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of 'King Lear'* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p.25.

Shakes so my single state of man that function
 Is smothered in surmise and nothing is
 But what is not. [*Macbeth* 1.3. 168-141]

In other words, Aquinas' "speculative [---] power and [---] active or practical power" are at war. "State" in these lines can thus be read either literally or metaphorically. Brutus, describing the same phenomenon, elaborates the comparison between the fragmented human personality and a kingdom divided against itself:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
 And the first motion, all the interim is
 Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.
 The genius and the mortal instruments
 Are then in counsel, and the state of man,
 Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
 The nature of an insurrection.
 [*Julius Caesar* 2.1. 63-69]

The rebellion that Laertes leads against Claudius can thus be seen as objective correlative for this internal 'insurrection', as grief and rage at his father's murder overwhelm his 'nobler reason', so that his 'active and practical power' is exerted without the guidance of his 'speculative [---] power'. With his 'single state of man' in turmoil, he cannot, in Hooker's – or Polonius' – terms, be true to himself, and so his perfidy towards Hamlet follows 'as surely as the night the day'.

Philip Edwards rightly comments that Polonius' words 'radiate over the whole play'.²¹ His injunction to Laertes, as Edwards points out 'touches the centre of Hamlet's predicament. "To thine own self be true!" But to which self? He cannot reach the self to which he must be true'.²² Though the external action of Hamlet is concerned with revenge, the more important internal action is devoted to the hero's search for identity, a search in which, through soliloquy, the audience is implicated, so that the 'necessary question of the play' to use Hamlet's own term is not, 'What will Hamlet *do*?' but rather, 'What is it like to *be* Hamlet?' and, as a corollary to that, 'What does it mean to be human?' Two striking visual images afford some kind of answer to these questions: one is the hero's entrance in Act 2 Scene 2 reading a book; the other is the moment in Act 5 Scene 1 when he holds Yorick's skull. Together, they illustrate the essential ambiguity at the core of human nature, the conjunction of spirit and matter, 'noble mind' [*Hamlet* 3.1. 153] and 'solid flesh' [*Hamlet* 1.2. 129], god-like 'apprehension' [*Hamlet* 2.2. 308] and 'the bodily mortality which humankind shares with the beasts'.²³ Through these twin 'icons', as Jonathan Bate has termed them,²⁴ Hamlet represents their own humanity to the audience. It is this representative quality in the character which, according to Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, makes him 'the most complete and thoroughly human creation in the play' Moreover, as Maquerlot also notes, the ambiguity embodied in Hamlet is also projected onto his father and uncle:

²¹ Edwards (ed), *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, p.98n.

²² Edwards, p.98n

²³ Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1997) p.254.

Hamlet twice compares his father to Hyperion (1.ii, 140; III iv, 56) and, through lavish mythological references, he likens him to a god [---]. And yet the human nature of the dead father is not overlooked: 'A was a man, take him for all in all' (1.ii, 187), --- Opposite this half-godlike, half-human creature stands another double, Claudius, half-man and half-beast, whose dual nature is reflected in the half-marking image of the satyr (1.ii, 140). Taken together, the two brother kings reconstitute the mythical wholeness of man, partaking of divinity and animality.²⁵

However, any reading of *Hamlet*, with its 'wealth of meanings, ambiguities, high-handed contradictions and supreme and troubling beauty'²⁶ as a kind of latter-day morality illustrating man's role as the key link in the great chain of being is clearly inadequate. It is as far from this kind of drama as it is from the conventional revenge play.

'[What] sets Hamlet apart from the traditional revenger', as Jonathan Bate points out, 'is [his] extreme self-consciousness'²⁷ and it is precisely this intense inner life which distinguishes him from the formulaic figures of morality:

When alone on stage, reflecting on his own situation, he seems to embody the very nature of human *being*; it is consciousness that forms his sense of self, his 'character', and in so doing makes it agonisingly difficult for him to perform the action that is demanded of him.²⁸

²⁴ Bate, p.253.

1995), p.104.

²⁵ Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition: A Reading of Five Problem Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.104.

²⁶ Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.280.

²⁷ Bate, p.257.

²⁸ Bate, p.257.

Indeed, it might be said that, for Hamlet, being *is* consciousness, and what he is most conscious of is himself. In this respect, the Prince of Denmark resembles the great sixteenth-century philosopher, Michel de Montaigne. Robert Ellrodt concludes that *Hamlet*, along with *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*, is ‘consistent with the spirit of Montaigne’.²⁹ Certainly, Hamlet’s habit of regarding his own problems in the light of universal ills corresponds to Montaigne’s belief that ‘all human beings --- bore in themselves the entire “form” of the human race [so that] to study one man is in a sense to study them all’,³⁰ and the Penguin translator’s description of the essays is equally true of Hamlet’s soliloquies: they are both ‘attempts to find out more about himself, about the human condition --- and about the limits of human nature’.³¹

What Montaigne’s introspection revealed was not a fixed, stable personality but an identity in a constant state of flux. In “On Educating Children”, for instance, he observes, ‘—I ayme at nothing but to display my selfe, who peradventure (if a new prentiship change me) shall be another tomorrow.’³² It is this sense of the human capacity for change, which makes the author of the *Essais*, in M. A. Screech’s words, ‘one of the great sages of that modern world which in a sense began with the Renaissance’.³³

²⁹ Robert Ellrodt, ‘Self-Consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 28 (1975) 37-50 (p.49).

³⁰ M. A. Screech, *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays* (London: Penguin, 1991) Introduction p. xvi.

³¹ Screech, p.xvi.

³² *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaign*; trans. John Florio, 4 vols (London: Dent & Sons, 1910), I p.152.

³³ Screech, p.xiii

As we have seen, the pre-modern model of human nature was of a monstrous hybrid, half spirit and half animal, compounded of dust yet made in the image of God, occupying a liminal position on the scale of being midway between the angels and the brutes, ineluctably divided yet striving, through reason, to achieve consistency, to remain 'ever the same'. In the Renaissance, however, this model was challenged by a radically different view of humanity in which the dualism of body and spirit was replaced by the dualism of being and consciousness, leading to what Anthony Dawson has defined as 'a sense of a fragmented and subjected self, but one which is also improvisatory and questing, very much its own'.³⁴ An extreme and very influential version of this model is to be found in Pico della Mirandola's creation myth, in which God endows Adam with the gift of freedom to choose his own nature:

He therefore took man as a creature of indeterminate nature, and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus: 'Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgement thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's centre that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honour, as though the maker and the moulder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer.'³⁵

³⁴ Anthony B. Dawson, *Hamlet* (Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press, 1995), p.7.

³⁵ Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London and New York : Routledge, 1977), pp. 95-96.

The discourse in which this passage appears, published posthumously and given the title, *De Hominis Dignitate*, was not fully translated into English until 1944³⁶ but if we accept Park Honan's argument that Shakespeare's education at Stratford Grammar School would have given him a good command of Latin and moreover that the curriculum would have been influenced by a Christian humanism rooted in 'the writings of fifteenth-century Florentines [including] Pico della Mirandola'³⁷ it is not improbable that he would have been familiar with at least the gist of a work which has been described as 'the manifesto of Renaissance Humanism'.³⁸

As Thomas Greene points out, 'the doctrine of man's indeterminate nature conflicted [not only] with the doctrine common to Aristotle and the Scholastics which held human nature to be inalterably fixed [--- but also] with mediaeval doctrines of personality ---, doctrines which attribute an unalterable *thisness* to each separate creature --- which the individual is unable to modify'.³⁹ Just as Tresham's lodge perfectly expresses 'unalterable thisness', so Pico's theory of indeterminacy is brilliantly exemplified in the Palazzo del Té, designed by Guilio Romano for Frederico Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. As the triangular lodge pleases by its consistent fidelity to a single idea, so the Gonzaga palace charms by its dazzling variety. Each façade is different, combining a range of forms and textures. Every room has a different theme,

³⁶ Davies, p.95.

³⁷ Honan, p.47.

³⁸ W. G. Craven, Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: Symbol of His Age, quoted in Davies, p.95.

³⁹ 'The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature' in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation and History* ed. by Peter Demetz, Thomas Green and Lowry Nelson Junior (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1968), pp.241-264 (p.243-244).

so that as one proceeds through the hall of the giants, the hall of the horses, the hall of the eagles, one is overwhelmed by a sense of playful magnificence – or magnificent playfulness – which gives form and substance to Pico's celebration of human versatility and potentiality for change. Both the pre-modern and the early modern theories of human nature set man at the mid-point of creation, but whereas the traditional orthodoxy fixed him inescapably between the higher (spiritual) and the lower (material) levels of existence, the Renaissance model places him at the centre of the wide plane of being and sets him free to range at will. A common icon of man as hybrid was the centaur, and especially Chiron, 'a popular allegorical figure in the Renaissance tradition,' according to Stephen McKnight, and emblem of Ficino's account of the soul in *Theologica Platonica* and *De Vita Triplici*: 'the nether parts link human beings with the world of the body and the senses; the higher region joins divine and human reason'.⁴⁰ The symbol of man's variable and self-determining nature was the shape-shifting sea-god, Proteus, who appears in Book IV of the *Odyssey* and in Virgil's *Georgics*; where the water-nymph, Cyrene, advises her son to seek his advice:

Him, my son, thou must first take in fetters [---] For without force he will give thee no counsel [---] But when thou holdest him in the grasp of hands and fetters, then will manifold forms baffle thee, and figures of wild beasts. For of a sudden he will become a bristly bear, a deadly tiger, a scaly serpent, or a lioness with tawny neck; or he will give forth the fierce roar of flame, and thus slip from his fetters, or he will melt into fleeting water and be gone.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stephen A. McKnight, *The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom: A Reconsideration of Historical Consciousness 1450-1650* (Columbia and London : University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 94-95.

⁴¹ *Georgics* IV 398-410.

A. Bartlett Giamatti has demonstrated the prevalence of the Proteus myth in Renaissance art, thought and literature,⁴² and Alberto Manguel points out that ‘according to one version of the story, he was the first man, imagined by the gods as a creature of endless possibilities’.⁴³ The concept of the protean self, posited in *De Hominis Dignitate* recurs in many forms throughout the Renaissance: in the career of Petrarch which, as Thomas Greene points out, dazzled his contemporaries with its ‘creative *varietas* [---], not only [---] the variety of books he wrote [---] but [---] the variety of roles [he] improvised successfully upon the stage of European politics and letters’⁴⁴; in the accomplishments of Castiglione’s ideal courtier; in the life of the poet/soldier/courtier, Sir Philip Sidney, Queen Elizabeth I’s ‘Shepherd Knight’, and in the titles – Cynthia, Diana, Astraea, Deborah, Belphebe, Gloriana – under which Elizabeth herself was honoured by poets, courtiers, ballad makers and painters. For despite her motto, ‘*Semper Eadem*’, the Virgin Queen was well aware of the value of what Stephen Greenblatt has called ‘self-fashioning’ in controlling her fractious court and her potentially unruly subjects.

Greenblatt traces the relationship between self-fashioning and performance, particularly in the context of Renaissance courts, where ‘theatricality, in the sense of both disguise and histrionic self-presentation’⁴⁵ flourished in an

⁴² A. Bartlett Giamatti, ‘Proteus Unbound : Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance’ in *The Disciplines of Criticism* in Demetz etc. pp.437-475.

⁴³ Alberto Manguel, *Into the Looking-Glass World* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p.39.

⁴⁴ Greene, p.248.

⁴⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, pb edn.(Chicago and London. University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.162.

atmosphere of dissimulation and artifice satirised by Philibert de Vienne in *The Philosopher of the Court* [1547], which concludes with a mock-encomium to Protean man:

This facility of the spirit is not therefore to be blamed which makes men according to the pleasure of others to change and transform himself. For in so doing he shall be accounted wise, win honour, and be free of reprehension everywhere: which *Proteus* knew very well, to whom his diverse Metamorphosis and transfiguration was very commodious.⁴⁶

Hamlet, ‘the courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s eye, tongue, sword’, [*Hamlet* 3.1.154] with his talent for dissimulation and transformation, displays many of the features of protean man, most of all, perhaps, in his enthusiasm for the theatre, the ultimate form of ‘self-fashioning’, whilst his frequent changes of mood illustrate that ‘flexibility of the self’ which Greene sees as characteristic of Renaissance psychology.⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, for instance, notes how between the end of ‘The Mouse-trap’ and the killing of Polonius he switches from ‘jubilation [at having unmasked Claudius] to a perverted exercise of reason [as he decides not to kill the King at prayer] to reckless [----] irresponsibility [when he becomes] the play’s second murderer’.⁴⁸

As Jonathan Bate points out, however, the idea of man as protean predates Pico’s *Discourse* by fourteen hundred years:

Recent criticism [---] has not always recognised that the flexible self has a prime classical exemplar in Ovid. There could be no better motto for the Renaissance self-fashioner than some lines in the *Ars*, which Shakespeare’s fellow-dramatist, Thomas Heywood, translated as follows:

⁴⁶ Philibert de Vienne, *The Philosopher of the Court*, quoted in Greenblatt, p.164.

⁴⁷ Greene, p.248

⁴⁸ Maquerlot, pp.100-101.

He that is apt will in himself devise
 Innumerable shapes of fit disguise
 To shift and chaunge like *Proteus* whom we see,
 A Lyon first, a Boar, and then a Tree.⁴⁹

The lover here, like de Vienne's courtier, must constantly re-invent himself to please his mistress. As Bate points out, in Augustan Rome 'the fashioning of the self is limited by the constraints of social convention and ultimately of state power'.⁵⁰ In the *Metamorphoses*, however, Ovid evokes a world in which transformation is the norm and where 'nature loving ever change repayres one shape a new'.⁵¹ If, as Giametti claims, Proteus is one of the most potent and influential myths of the Renaissance, then surely the *Metamorphoses* must be one of its most potent and influential texts. Translated, imitated, illustrated, allegorised and moralised, according to Lawrence Lerner its presence is so universal as to be virtually undetectable since, he argues, 'if you absorbed Ovid, not perhaps with your mother's milk but with your schoolmaster's rod, you – and your readers – might not know when you were using him'.⁵² Leonard Barkhin⁵³ and Charles and Michelle Martindale⁵⁴ as well as Jonathan Bate have all commented on Shakespeare's debt to the *Metamorphoses* and though Bate and the Martindales differ as to

⁴⁹ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰ Bate, p.4.

⁵¹ *Shakespeare's Ovid Being Arthur Golding's Translation of the Metamorphoses*, ed. by W.H.D. Rouse (London: De La More Press, 1904), XV 277.

⁵² Lawrence Lerner, 'Ovid and the Elizabethans', in *Ovid Renewed : Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art From the Middle Ages To the Twentieth Century* ed. By Charles Martindale (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press 1988),pp. 121-135 (p.122).

⁵³ Leonard Barkhin, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphoses and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986),

⁵⁴ Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 56-76.

the precise nature of a sixteenth-century audience's probable response to his Ovidian allusions, they are united in acknowledging his extensive knowledge of the work, both in Golding's translation and in the original. Three tales in particular concern themselves with the questions of selfhood, duality and the monstrous which are the subject of this thesis: these are the stories of Actaeon, Narcissus and Hermaphroditus.

Salomon's engraving of the metamorphosis of Actaeon, to which I referred in my Introduction, captures the moment when Diana set 'A payre of lively old Harts hornes upon his sprinkled head [; ---] shape[d] his eares [and made] his neck both slender, long and lank' [Golding III 229-231], and depicts the huntsman as a hybrid monster with a stag's head and a human body. Even when his transformation was complete, however, and he was brought down by his own hounds, Actaeon remained monstrous. Colin Burrow points out that 'the tale of Actaeon is unusual in Ovid for ending with the complete destruction of the hero rather than his perpetual fusion with the natural world',⁵⁵ it is also unusual in that he retains his human consciousness, desperately trying to communicate with his companions as the pack bring him to bay:

He could none other do
But sigh, and in the shape of Hart with voyce as Hartes are
woont,
(For voyce of man was none now left to helpe him at the brunt)
By braying show his secret grief among the Mountaynes hie,
And kneeling sadly on his knees with dreerie teares in eye,
As one by humbling of himselfe that mercy seemde to crave,
With piteous looke in stead of handes his head about to wave.

⁵⁵ Colin Burrow, 'Original Fictions: Metamorphoses in the "Faerie Queene"', in *Ovid Renewed*, pp. 99-119 (p.117-118).

Not knowing that it was their Lord, the hunstmen cheere their
 hounds
 With wonted noyse and for *Actaeon* looke about the grounds.
 They hallow who could lowdest crie still calling him by name
 As though he were not there, and much his absence they do
 blame,
 In that he came not to the fall, but slackt to see the game
 As often as they named him he sadly shooke his head,
 And faine he would have beene away thence in some other
 stead,
 But there he was. [Golding III 285-299]

The counterpoint of presence and absence in these lines points to the enigma which they pose: where and what is Actaeon's self at this moment, in the body of the stag or in the human consciousness which tries to reach out to the humanity of his comrades? William Carrol asks a similar question in *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy*: 'how can we recognise and speak of something as being the same thing and yet no longer itself?'⁵⁶ Both self and not-self, Actaeon is a metamorphic monster, a dual being within a single form.

Noting a similar duality in his own experience, the physicist, James Trefil, acknowledges, 'no matter how much interplay there is between my brain and my body ---- I am aware of a self that looks out at the world from somewhere inside my skull.'⁵⁷ The complex interplay between brain and body is cruelly brought home to Actaeon as he is attacked by his own dogs and desperately wishes he could separate that observing self from the pain he feels in every nerve. Narcissus, on the other hand, when he sees his own beauty reflected in

⁵⁶ William C. Carroll, *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.4.

⁵⁷ quoted in David Lodge, *Consciousness And The Novel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), p.8.

the pool, at first laments that he cannot bring his inner and outer selves together:

I see and am full faine,
 Howbeit that I like and see I cannot yet attaine: [---]
 He would be had. For looke how oft I kisse the water under,
 So oft againe with upwarde mouth he ryseth towarde me [---]
 [Golding Bk III 559-566]

Once he realises however that the two are one, that he is both subject and object, observer and observed, he cries, 'O would to God I for a while might from my bodie part'. [Golding, III 588]. The nymph Salamacis also admires her reflection in a pool as she sits combing her hair with a boxwood comb and gazing into the water to observe the effect of her *coiffure*, but it is her passion for Hermaphroditus which brings about their metamorphosis, when her fervent prayer that they might never be separated is answered in the most literal way:

Like as if a man should in one barke beholde
 Two twigges both growing into one and still together holde:
 Even so when through hir hugging and hir grasping of the tother
 The members of them mingled were and fastned both together,
 They were not any longer two: but (as it were) a toy
 Of double shape: Ye could not say it was a perfect boy,
 Nor perfect wench: it seemed both and none of both to beene.
 [Golding IV 464-470]

'Both and neither' is the hallmark of all these three stories and of the monstrous metamorphs that figure in them. Narcissus is both lover and beloved but, since his love is based on an illusion, it can never be fulfilled;

Actaeon is neither man nor stag, though he has characteristics of both; Salmacis' transformation involves both gain and loss: she achieves her desire, but at the cost of her own name and identity; moreover her obsessive devotion weakens and emasculates its object. Any suggestion that their union constitutes a happy ending is dispelled by the metamorphosed Hermaphroditus' curse:

Whoso comes within this Well may so be weakened there
That of a man but halfe a man he may fro thence retire.
[Golding Bk IV 477-478]

The meaning Jonathan Bate finds in Actaeon's fate applies to this story also, and to that of Narcissus: 'when you think you've seen what you most desire, it destroys you'.⁵⁸ Indeed, through all these fabulous tales of gods and goddesses, nymphs and heroes runs a deep vein of human experience, viewed sometimes ironically, often with genuine sympathy. As Mary Innes notes, '[Ovid] portrays [---] pity and fear, tenderness and love, the first stirrings of passion, the turbulent jealousy of scorned love, with a faithfulness which no modern psychologist could surpass'.⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, then, the *Metamorphoses* inspired a number of moralising commentaries during the Renaissance, such as George Schuler's 1555 edition, which abandoned the elaborate allegorical interpretations of the work popular during the middle

⁵⁸ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.3.

⁵⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), Introduction, p.15.

ages and instead suggested ‘that the transformation of men into beasts should be viewed metaphorically as an image of monstrous human behaviour’.⁶⁰

Like Ovid’s metamorphs, hybrid monsters were also used as representations of human nature. So Botticelli’s ‘Minerva and the Centaur’ illustrated “[man’s] godlike capacity for knowledge transform[ing his] sensate, earthbound life into a life of transcendent knowledge and fulfilment’.⁶¹ The painting, in which Minerva gently rests her hand on the centaur’s head, is a moving icon of humanity’s inherently divided nature. Such icons could, however, also be used as means of personal denunciation or panegyric; a placard accusing Mary Stuart of her husband’s murder depicted the queen as a mermaid⁶² – a beautiful temptress who lured men to their doom, whereas in a pamphlet celebrating the defeat of the Armada, Elizabeth I appeared as a victorious Amazon, a fitting image for a monarch who combined ‘the body--- of a weak and feeble woman [with] – the heart and stomach of a king.’⁶³

Hybrid monsters symbolise the essential duality of human nature; metamorphs demonstrate the transforming power of passion, especially erotic passion. Both portray human beings as constrained by their own nature. The image of Protean man, however, suggests that mankind is essentially free to choose its own nature. Yet this model, too, is morally ambiguous. As embodied by Castiglione’s ideal courtier, it was a synthesis of ‘the idea of the

⁶⁰ Bate, p.28.

⁶¹ McKnight, p.93.

⁶² Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson pb. edn. 1970), p.19.

⁶³ *Elizabeth I, Collected Works*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus, Januel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.326.

warrior and the scholar, the Christian believer and the classical hero, the self-contained man of *virtu* and the dutiful servant of the prince'.⁶⁴ Yet man could also use his talent for self-fashioning in morally dubious ways. Thus Machiavelli encourages rulers deliberately to exploit their lower, animal nature for political ends, 'sometimes act[ing] the powerful, decisive lion, sometimes the wily, elusive fox'.⁶⁵ Even aspiring to rise above one's humanity is perilous, as Montaigne warns: 'attempt, without a special gift of grace, to soar aloft and rank with the angels and you will end up a maniac: not an angel but below a beast; not supernally moral but subterrestrially immoral'.⁶⁶

How, then, is this "paragon of animals" to live? How can man attempt to reconcile the inherent contradictions in his nature? It is my argument in this thesis that Shakespeare consistently invokes the idea of the monstrous, of the divided, transgressive, ambivalent areas of the human psyche, to explore the implications of this question.

⁶⁴ Baldesar Castiglione: *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. by George Bull, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1976), Introduction, p.14.

⁶⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli: *The Prince* ed. By Antony Grafton, trans. by George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1999), introduction, p. xxii

⁶⁶ Screech, p. xlvi

II

Suddenly, as I watched their grotesque and unaccountable gestures, I perceived clearly for the first time what it was that had offended me, what had given me the two inconsistent and conflicting impressions of utter strangeness and yet of the strongest familiarity. The three creatures engaged in this mysterious rite were human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal. Each of these creatures, despite its human form, its rag of clothing, and the rough humanity of its bodily form, had woven into it, into its movements, into the expression of its countenance, into its whole presence, some now irresistible suggestion of a hog, a swinish taint, the unmistakable mark of the beast”.

H. G. Wells: *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

Chapter II

Cupid's Pageant: The Metamorphosed Self

As Oberon plots his revenge on Titania for withholding the 'little changeling boy' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.120), he reminds Puck of an episode in the age-old contest between Cupid and Diana, erotic love and chastity:

[...] Thou rememb' rest
 Since once I sat upon a promontory
 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
 To hear the sea-maid's music?
 [...]
 That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth
 Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
 And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
 And the imperial vot'ress passèd on
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.148-164).

The iconography is familiar to modern audiences: a winged child (or young man) armed with bow and arrows, and, as a graceful tribute to the Virgin

Queen, the 'love-shaft' missing its intended aim, deflected by the influence of the moon-goddess. However, images of Cupid in the Renaissance depict a more complex, and sometimes a more threatening figure, a figure closer to the Greek *eros* who, as Bruce Thornton points out, was far from 'the chubby putto that adorns a million Valentine's Day cards'.⁶⁷ Eros, according to Thornton, is 'a force of nature, a window into the irrational where swarm myriad other desires whose excess leads to our destruction, something [...] that actively conquers, that tames and breaks and subdues'.⁶⁸ It is the power of love to conquer and subdue that Valentine is brought to acknowledge in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*:

O gentle Proteus, love's a mighty lord,
And hath so humbled me as I confess
There is no woe to his correction,
Nor to his service no such joy on earth.

(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2.4.235-238).

A rather disturbing feature of this power is suggested in Oberon's speech: the references to sight recall the fact that Cupid is often depicted blindfold, and his 'fiery shaft' is reminiscent of another of his iconographic attributes, a blazing torch. The association of fire with blindness suggests the random, uncontrollable nature of passion. Blindness is a characteristic of Ate, the personification of infatuation and, in Book VII of the *Aeneid*, Allecto, goddess of discord, is associated with firebrands and 'funereas [...] faces'.⁶⁹ The power

⁶⁷ Bruce S. Thornton, *Eros: The Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford : Westview Press, 1997), p.12.

⁶⁸ Thornton, p.14.

⁶⁹ *Aeneid*, VIII 337

to inspire conflict and irrational behaviour is seen in the effect of Love-in-Idleness on the increasingly crazed and quarrelsome lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even Puck, who, as dispenser of the love-juice, acts as Cupid's agent, even, perhaps, as his surrogate, comments sympathetically on their plight: 'Cupid is a knavish lad | Thus to make poor females mad' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.3.28-29). In Oberon's vignette of love and chastity, madness is induced not only by the 'little western flower' but also by the mermaid's song, which tempts the very stars to leave their courses and, as I hope to show, there is another, more covert and sinister, connection between Cupid and the singing 'sea-maid'.

At their first assignation in Pandarus' orchard, Troilus assures Cressida that 'in all Cupid's pageant there is presented no monster' (*Troilus and Cressida* 3.2.71-72). However, with his human body and bird-like wings, Cupid is himself a kind of monster and, in some manifestations, appears more monstrous still. As Erwin Panofsky points out 'the typical Cupid of the Renaissance ... had to extricate himself from a very strange-looking and, indeed, demonical image'⁷⁰ and goes on to cite two works of art, a fourteenth-century mural in the church of St. Francis in Assisi and a sixteenth-century tapestry portraying 'The Triumph of Love', in which Cupid is depicted with talons instead of feet. Since in the late middle ages the devil was frequently represented as claw-footed, this image of love is particularly disquieting. A German woodcut of 'The Demon Lover', dated 1489, in which

⁷⁰ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconography : Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.114.

a fashionably dressed young man with bird's feet is embracing a nubile young woman, fuses ideas of diabolism and eroticism in the same disturbing image.⁷¹ Even without these diabolical connotations however, a claw-footed Cupid has uncomfortable associations; half human and half bird, he is kin to those other avian monsters, sirens and harpies.

The iconography of these creatures is somewhat confused. Both are represented sometimes as birds with women's heads, sometimes as women with wings and birds' feet, sometimes as perfect hybrids, half woman and half bird. What differentiates between them is their behaviour: harpies are raptors, carrying people off in their claws or robbing them of food by snatching it away or contaminating it with their excrement. An emblem in Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* (1612), entitled '*In repundos, et adultores*', depicts a female figure with birds' legs and wings standing on a table laid for a meal, her claws resting on what appears to be a pie.⁷² David Lindley's description of this creature as 'rather domesticated and disconsolate'⁷³ may have been prompted in part by the setting, which is indeed domestic, an opulent-looking interior with pillars and a balustrade, but the title and the accompanying verse have more sinister implications. The verse will be discussed later in this chapter. At this point it is the figure of the bird-woman herself which is relevant. It is clearly meant to represent a harpy; its (admittedly rather

⁷¹ Lyndale Roper, 'Today's History', *History Today* 52 (2002) 31-35 (p32).

⁷² reproduced in *The Tempest* ed. by David Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.27

⁷³ Lindley (ed.), *The Tempest*: p.27.

decorous) appropriation of the pie suggests as much. However, there is something of the siren in its almost ostentatiously nubile appearance and in its association with flattery and deception. True, Virgil's harpies are 'virginei volucrum vultus' [*Aeneid* III 216] but the creature in the *Minerva Britannia* emblem appears more vamp than virgin. In Christian symbolism the siren represented lechery and came to be used as an example of the contrast between the world of sensory perception and the underlying reality. Dante's use of this trope in his *Divine Comedy* conflates the dangerous attractions of the siren and the disgusting habits of the harpy: 'the siren in the nineteenth canto of [...] *Purgatory* stuttered, squinted and had deformed hands and feet; when Virgil looked at her she became fluent and beautiful, but Virgil was able to reveal the reality once more by tearing open her clothes, at which a terrible stench awakened him'.⁷⁴ From the tenth century onwards, however, an alternative version of the siren began to emerge, a woman with the tail of a fish. Indeed, in a medieaval bestiary in the Bodlean Library the text describes a bird-woman but the accompanying illustration shows a fish-woman.⁷⁵ Thus, the siren became indistinguishable from the mermaid, so that Antiphilus of Syracuse, overcome by Luciana's charms, equates the two seductive singers in a single metaphor:

O train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note
To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears.

⁷⁴ Helen King, 'Half-Human Creatures', in *Mythical Beasts*, ed. By John Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1995) pp. 138-167 (p.147).

⁷⁵ *M. S. Bodley 764* trans. by Richard Barber (London : Folio Society, 1992), p.150.

Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote.
 (The Comedy of Errors 3.2.45-47).

So, by association with the siren/harpy, the 'mermaid on a dolphin's back' in Oberon's story is more closely related to Cupid than at first appears.

The Cupid of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though ostensibly more innocuous than the claw-footed monster depicted in 'The Triumph of Love', is nevertheless a potent and dangerous force; even before being exposed to the hazards of the wood and the post-hypnotic effects of Love-in-Idleness, Helena is uneasily aware of his influence:

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
 Love can transpose to form and dignity.
 Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
 And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
 Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste;
 Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
 And therefore is love said to be a child
 Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
 (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1.1.232-239).

Demetrius' unfaithfulness has already taught Helena a harsh lesson in love's capacity to alter perception. 'Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind' might seem to refer to the power, figured in the incident of Virgil and the siren, to distinguish between appearance and reality. However, in this context, where 'mind' is divorced from 'judgement', it clearly connotes not insight but illusion. Helena's deconstruction of Cupid's attributes (swiftness, blindness, lack of judgement) precisely anticipates the effects of Love-in-Idleness which,

significantly, operates only on 'sleeping eyelids' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.170), in other words, at the level of the unconscious, the level of the imagination and of dreams. It is this kind of altered perception which Theseus attributes not merely to love but also to insanity and poetic inspiration:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
 Are of imagination all compact.
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
 That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.4-17).

'Fantasies' and 'cool reason' are the equivalents of Helena's 'mind' and 'judgement', but the imaginative power of madness and poetry is different from that of love. The former is creative, inventing non-existent devils or giving form and substance to 'airy nothing'. Love, however, is transformative, 'transpos[ing]' ugliness into beauty, 'a brow of Egypt' into Helen of Troy. And the reverse is also true: under the influence of Cupid's flower, Lysander reviles Hermia as an 'Ethiope' and a 'tawny Tartar' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.2.258, 264). For the alternative to love, in this play, is not indifference but loathing. The mythological reason for this lies in Book I of

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Pledging her faith to Lysander, Hermia swears by 'Cupid's strongest bow, | By his best arrow with the golden head...' (1.1.169-170), a reference to the tale of Apollo and Daphne, in which Cupid revenges himself on Apollo:

---From hys quiver full of shafts two arrows did he take
Of sundrie workes: tone causeth Love, the tother doth it slake.
That causeth love, is all of golde with point full sharpe and
bright,
That chaseth love is blunt, whose steele with leaden head is
dight.
The God thus fired in the Nymph Peneis for the nones.
The tother perst Apollos hart and overraft his bones.
Immediately in smoldring heate of love the tone did swelt,
Againe the tother in hir heart no sparke nor motion felt.
In woods and forests is hir joy the savage beasts to chase,
And as the price of all hir paine too take the skinne and case.
Unmedded Phebe doth she haunt and follow as hir guide [---].
[Golding Bk I 565-575]

Here, as in Oberon's narrative, Cupid is seen in opposition to Diana, not, in this instance, as moon-goddess but as huntress and haunter of the woods whose avatar, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is Oberon's consort, Titania. Peter Holland has drawn attention to 'the complex associations of Diana and Titania' and to the ways in which Puck's 'dramatic function aligns him closely with Cupid in the play's mythological schema'.⁷⁶ Cupid and Diana are both associated with metamorphoses, Cupid (as we have seen) with the story of Daphne, Diana with one of the most famous episodes in Ovid, parodied in Shakespeare's play by the 'translation' of Bottom. As Charles and Michelle Martindale point out, the figure of the partially transformed Actaeon was 'a

⁷⁶ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. By Peter Holland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 323, 341 pp 323, 341.

well-known iconographic type with which audiences would have been familiar'⁷⁷ and which would have been clearly recognisable in the spectacle of the ass-headed weaver. Artists have illustrated the fate of Actaeon in two ways: in antiquity, the moment represented is his death and, curiously, 'no metamorphosis is visible', though in a metope from Selinunte c. 465 B.C. in the Museo Nazionale Palermo he is shown with an animal skin tied round his shoulders.⁷⁸ A painting by Cranach, dated about 1520, conflates episodes from the beginning and the end of the tale, showing on the right Diana and her nymphs bathing and on the left Actaeon in the form of a stag with human legs being savaged by his hounds.⁷⁹ As the Martindales point out, however, Renaissance artists tended to concentrate on the actual moment of transformation, so that 'Actaeon [...] is represented, not as a stag, but as a man with a stag's head'.⁸⁰ Salomon's engraving, described in the Introduction to this thesis, captures this moment. The monstrous figure of Actaeon appears both terrifying and vulnerable. His height emphasized and extended by the stag's antlers, he seems to threaten the shrinking figure of Diana, yet his right arm is flung out in a gesture at once placatory and despairing. In Titian's version of the scene, however, there is no such ambiguity; the hero's mortal frailty is contrasted with 'the massive figure of Diana shooting an arrow and

⁷⁷ Martindale, p.65.

⁷⁸ I. Aghion, C. Barbillon, E. Lissarrague, *Gods and Heroes of Classical Antiquity* (Paris and New York : Flammarion, 1994), p.14.

⁷⁹ Aghion, p.14.

⁸⁰ Martindale, p.65.

staring ahead of her unremittingly, pitilessly indifferent to his fate, an overwhelming image of divine power.’⁸¹

In Shakespeare’s playful reworking of the myth, however, the tragic and horrific elements are removed and the situation is reversed: it is the surrogate Cupid, Puck, who effects the transformation and the surrogate Actaeon, Bottom, far from being destroyed, enjoys the sexual favours of the surrogate Diana, Titania. And so the failure of Cupid’s assault on the ‘fair vestal’ in Oberon’s story, is avenged, as Diana’s avatar succumbs to the power of Love-in-Idleness, a power derived from Cupid’s arrow.

As well as neatly inverting the original story, Shakespeare out-Ovids Ovid by making Bottom undergo a double metamorphosis, from weaver to ass-headed monster and then, in Titania’s love-charmed eyes, into an object of desire. And yet, as Charles and Michelle Martindale observe, ‘He remains gloriously himself, ridiculous, vain, cock-sure, ebullient, kindly, an inspirer of affection in others, a source of life and delight’.⁸² In this respect, at least, he resembles Actaeon who, throughout his transformation, retains his former identity:

But when he saw his face
 And horned temples in the brooke, he would have cryde alas,
 But as for then no kinde of speech out of his lippes could passe
 He sight and brayed: for that was then the speech that did
 remaine
 And downe the eyes that were not his, his bitter teares did raine.

⁸¹ Martindale, p.65.

⁸² Martindale, p.66.

No part remained (save his minde) of that he last had beene.
[Golding III 236-241]

In Max Reinhardt's film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jimmy Cagney as Bottom saw his ass's head reflected in water and was overcome with weeping, and Peter Holland notes that Elijah Moshinsky used a similar device in his production for BBC television. However, though this draws attention to the parallels with the Actaeon story, it introduces an entirely new element into the play, in which, as Peter Holland points out, 'Bottom [...] shows no awareness that anything has changed'.⁸³ Indeed, much of the humour in the scenes between Bottom and the fairies depends on his total unconsciousness of a transformation which is all too apparent to the audience. Bottom's metamorphosis into Titania's 'gentle joy' [4.1.4], however, is purely subjective, a figment of the lover's imagination, and in this case the comedy arises from the fact that the audience can *not* see Bottom through Titania's eyes (or rather, to employ Helena's distinction, her 'mind').

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then, a single character undergoes a double metamorphosis; in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* there are two Actaeon-like transformations, one external and visible, the other internal and imaginary. John M. Steadman itemises the points of resemblance between Falstaff's 'disguise as Herne the Hunter and the standard Renaissance picture of Actaeon as a composite figure with a stag's head, human body, and hunter's clothing'.⁸⁴ Jonathan Bate, who quotes Steadman's commentary in

⁸³ Holland, ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p.72.

⁸⁴ Steadman, p.118.

Shakespeare and Ovid notes that 'Falstaff does not, however, perceive himself as Actaeon'⁸⁵ preferring to regard his disguise in the light of the animal forms adopted by Jupiter in his various amorous exploits: 'Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa; love set on thy horns. O powerful love, that in some respects makes a beast a man; in some other, a man a beast!' [*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.5.3-5]. However, the fat knight's analysis of his situation is fraught with dramatic irony. Firstly, Jove's transformations were voluntary, strategic and temporary, in other words, Protean not metamorphic, whilst, though Bate asserts that in this respect Falstaff 'is more like Jove than Actaeon in that the animal form is his chosen disguise, not a state he is forced into',⁸⁶ the audience knows that he has been duped into assuming it by Mesdames Ford and Page, patterns of outraged virtue every bit as indignant, if less deadly, than Titian's Diana. Moreover, as Bate himself acknowledges, 'his pinching at the hands of the children dressed as fairies is a comic nemesis that playfully revises the savaging of Actaeon by his own hounds'.⁸⁷ Secondly, the second part of Falstaff's speech is an unconscious allusion to Sandys' *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures* which moralizes Ovid's tale as the fate of a man who 'neglecting the pursuite of virtue and heroicall actions, puts off the minde of a man, and degenerates into

⁸⁵ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.165.

⁸⁶ Bate, p.166.

⁸⁷ Bate, p.165.

a beast'.⁸⁸ Thirdly, it is ironic that Falstaff, who had intended to cuckold his neighbours, Page and Ford, is himself forced to wear the cuckold's horns. And finally, the passion which has brought him to this pass is not, as he claims, love, but cupidity, that inordinate desire for money which is, according to St Paul, the root of all evil.⁸⁹

If Falstaff is a victim of his own *cupiditas*, the other Actaeon-figure in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is tormented by *eros*. Ford's possessive, even obsessive, love of his wife is an instance of the 'destructively excessive' desire which, according to Bruce Thornton, is the essence of *eros* in Greek literature,⁹⁰ a 'form of insanity' which suspends the power of reason.⁹¹ Certainly, though it is Pistol who actually calls him 'Sir Actaeon' [*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.119] there is something irrational in the alacrity with which Ford accepts the imputation of his wife's infidelity and in the jealous frenzy which prompts him to lead a rout of Windsor citizens through his house, hunting for evidence of his sexual humiliation. The embarrassed guests are urged, like Actaeon's hounds, to 'search, seek, find out' [3.3.155] in a giddy chase in which their increasingly demented host becomes both pursuer and pursued, confusing, in his tirade over the buck-basket, the antlers of the

⁸⁸ Quoted in Bate, p.164.

⁸⁹ *Epistle to Timothy* 6.10.

⁹⁰ Thornton, p.13.

⁹¹ Thornton, p.17.

rutting stag (his supposed rival) and his own (equally suppositious) cuckold's horns:

Buck? I would I could wash myself of the buck! Buck, buck, buck? Ay, buck, I warrant you, buck. And of the season too, it shall appear. [*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.3.150-152].

Well might Ford comment, on hearing that Falstaff has eluded his pursuit: 'If I have horns to make one mad, let the proverb go with me: I'll be horn-mad.' [*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.5.139-140]. Horn mad indeed!

Alice's adultery is, of course, no more than an product of her husband's 'seething brain', a figment of his fevered imagination which 'apprehends | More than cool reason ever comprehends'. The process which briefly transforms Orsino into Actaeon is also imaginative, but in this case it is the imagination of the poet, rather than the madman, which, out of his fancied love for Olivia, spins an elegant conceit in which he appears as the stricken huntsman and the Countess as a cruelly chaste Diana:

Curio:	Will you go hunt, my lord?
Orsino:	What, Curio?
Curio:	The hart.
Orsino:	Why so I do, the noblest that I have. O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first Methought she purged the air of pestilence; That instant was I turned into a hart, And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, E'er since, pursue me. [<i>Twelfth Night</i> 1.1.16-22]

This is metaphor, not metamorphosis. Orsino has appropriated certain elements of the Actaeon story to create a flattering self-portrait of the suffering lover, rather like the Hilliard miniature of 'A Youth Leaning Against a Tree Among Brier Roses' which, according to Leslie Hotson, symbolises 'Constant in Adversity'.⁹² The Ovidian allusion is a similar conceit or device, 'elliptical and compressed', as the Martindales have noted, rather than explicit.⁹³ By suppressing the name of Actaeon Orsino hints at the 'connection between passion and transformation'⁹⁴ whilst avoiding the conventional 'moralizing' of the myth elucidated by Sandys.⁹⁵ As the Martindales point out, the image is 'concerned with the self-scrutiny of the lover rather than with moral evaluation',⁹⁶ a graceful gesture in the direction of erotic desire rather than an expression of genuine passion.

Othello is also a self-styled Actaeon, though in a deeper and darker sense than that conveyed by Orsino's poetic attitudinizing. As Jonathan Bate points out, 'his "A hornèd man's a monster and a beast" (iv.i.60) is [...] not only a conventional reference to cuckoldry, but also [a] figure of bestial metamorphosis'.⁹⁷ Indeed, Bate believes that the play 'hinges on the metamorphosis of the hero at the hands of Iago'⁹⁸ and suggests that the term

⁹² Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare by Hilliard* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1977), p.93.

⁹³ Martindale, p.86.

⁹⁴ Barkan, p.206.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Bate, p.164.

⁹⁶ Martindale, p.86.

⁹⁷ Bate, p.184.

⁹⁸ Bate, p.181.

‘Spartan dog’, applied to Iago by Lodovico (*Othello* 5.2.371) relates to ‘Actaeon’s dogs who destroy their own master’.⁹⁹ However, *Othello* also contains an elaborate web of mythological allusion in which the hero appears at different times, as Theseus, Hercules and Ulysses, as well as Actaeon, and which is so dense and complex that it might be regarded as a kind of sub-text to the tragedy. The presiding genius of this hidden drama is Cupid, not the ‘knavish lad’ of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* but the cruel tyrant of the ‘Triumph of Love’ tapestry and the Assisi mural, or the terrible figure who, in Spenser’s House of Busirane, takes pleasure in the spectacle of Amoret having her heart torn out by Cruelty and Despight:

Next after her, the winged God him selfe
Came riding on a Lion revenous,
Taught to obay the menage of that Elfe
That man and beast with powre imperious
Subdeweth to his kingdome tyrannous.
His blindfold eies he bad awhile unbinde,
That his proud spoile of that same dolorous
Faure Dame he might behold in perfect kind;
Which scene, he much rejoyced in his cruell minde.¹⁰⁰

This Cupid, as we have seen, is closely akin to harpies, sirens and mermaids. In classical times he was also associated with centaurs and amazons, both of which symbolise the transgressive force of *eros*. All these creatures, as I hope

⁹⁹ Bate, p.184.

¹⁰⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. By Ernest Rhys, 2 vols (London : J.M. Dent, 1910), Bk III Canto XII xxiii

to prove, feature in the mythological sub-text of *Othello*.

The connection between amazons and centaurs and *eros* is defined by Bruce Thornton, who argues that ‘in the mind of the Greek male, women are dangerous and hence frightening because of their greater subjection to the natural appetites, especially sex, that [...] must be controlled in order for us to exist [as] humans’¹⁰¹ and thus ‘the myth of the Amazons [...] expresses the dire effects thought to result from reversing the natural order of things and letting women rule’.¹⁰² A similar vein of misogyny ran through the Christian tradition from Paul and Augustine to John Knox. Similarly, centaurs ‘as well as symbolizing sexual potency [...] [represented] the uneasy link of culture and nature in human identity’.¹⁰³ As we have seen, the view of human nature prevalent in Shakespeare’s day emphasized the uneasy disjunction between its intellectual and spiritual and its mortal and bestial elements. Thus, both amazons and centaurs were seen as a potential threat to civilized values and social harmony and their battles with Theseus became part of the iconography of the Early Modern Age. The Amazonomachy and the Lapithocentauro-machy are recorded by Plutarch and Ovid, two ancient authors with whose works we know Shakespeare was familiar, as epic clashes between civic order and barbarism. In his ‘Life of Theseus’, Plutarch is at pains to point out that the war with Hippolyta was ‘not a matter of small moment, nor an enterprise

¹⁰¹ Thornton, p.76.

¹⁰² Thornton, p.80.

¹⁰³ Thornton, p.39.

of a woman'.¹⁰⁴ It is clear that nothing less than the survival of Athens is at stake:

For they had not placed their campe within the very cittie of Athens, nor had not fought in the very place it selfe (called Pnyce) adjoyning to the temple of the *Muses*, if they had not first conquered or subdued all the countrie thereabouts: ---. Aridemus --- sayeth that the left poynt of their battle bent towards the place which they call AMAZONIAN: and that the right poynte marched by the side of CHRYSA, even to the place which is called PNYCE, upon which the ATHENIANS coming towards the temple of the *Muses*, dyd first give their charge [---]. And the ATHENIANS (sayeth he) were in this place repulsed by the AMAZONES, even to the place where the images of the *Eumenides* are, that is to saye, of the furies'.

The very real danger to Athens is clearly evident in this account of hard-fought conflict raging within the city-limits and around the future meeting place of the citizen-assembly, the repository of literature and the arts and the sacred site of the spirits of justice, symbols of Athenian government, Athenian culture and Athenian law - everything, in short, that is embraced by the word, civilization. As the Amazons threaten the stability of the *polis*, so the Centaurs' disruption of the Lapiths' wedding-feast threatens the security of the *oikos*. The sacrilegiously transgressive nature of their attempted abduction of Pirithous' bride and the other womenfolk is born out by the nature of the weapons to which both sides resort in the subsequent *melée*.

¹⁰⁴ *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. by Sir Thomas North (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1927) 8 Vols. Vol.1. p.33.

Golding's version, whilst dwelling with uninhibited relish on the injuries inflicted, fails to bring out this aspect of the affray, which is made more explicit in the more literal Loeb translation:

First Amycus, Ophion's son, scrupled not to rob the inner sanctuary of its gifts, and first snatched from the shrine a chandelier thick hung with glittering lamps [----] Then Gryneus, gazing with wild eyes upon the smoking altar near which he stood, cried out, "Why not use this?" and, catching up the huge altar, fire and all, he hurled it amidst a throng of Lapithae [---]. Exadius [---] found for weapon the antlers of a stag hung on a tall pine-tree as a votive offering [---]. Then Rhoetus caught up a blazing brand of plum-wood from the altar, and whirling it on the right, smashed through Charaxus' temples covered with yellow hair [---]. The wounded man shook off the greedy fire from his shaggy locks, then tore up from the ground and heaved up on his shoulders a threshold-stone, a weight for a team of oxen.¹⁰⁵

Both Amazons and Centaurs are transgressive beings, crossing male-female and human-animal boundaries. In these narratives, we see them destroying the literal boundaries erected by societies to protect themselves from feral wildness: Hippolyta and her troops breach the Athenian walls; the threshold of Pirithous' *oikos* is torn up in the heat of battle. In both cases, the political, social and religious conventions on which civilization depends for its survival are infringed. These conventions permeate both public and private life; indeed, Simon Goldhill defines the *oikos* as 'the private life of the public citizen'.¹⁰⁶ In *Othello*, the destruction of the hero's marriage involves the ruin of his political

¹⁰⁵ *Metamorphoses*, XII 245-248.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.69.

career as general and Governor of Cyprus: once convinced of his wife's infidelity, he senses that 'Othello's occupation's gone' (*Othello* 3.3.362). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Amazons and centaurs are contained within the humane confines of Theseus' court (Hippolyta content, in Millament's immortal phrase, to 'dwindle into a wife' and the centaurs suffering the even greater indignity of having their exploits rejected as entertainment for the wedding party). In *Othello*, however, these creatures, with the rest of 'Cupid's pageant', harpies, sirens and mermaids, haunt the story of the hero's downfall, signifying the victory of *eros* over both *oikos* and *polis* in a tragedy of errors which, anticipating Beaumont and Fletcher, might well have been subtitled 'Cupid's Revenge'.

Othello's offence, the act of sacrilegious pride which calls down the god's wrath, lies in the speech he makes to the Venetian Senate, supporting Desdemona's appeal to be allowed to accompany him on the expedition to Cyprus. Disclaiming any uxorious motive, he seconds her request in terms pregnant with dramatic irony:

Let her have your voice.
 Vouch with me heaven, I therefor beg it not
 To please the palate of my appetite,
 Nor to comply with heat - the young affects
 In me defunct - and proper satisfaction,
 But to be free and bounteous to her mind;
 And heaven defend your good souls that you think
 I will your serious and great business scant
 When she is with me. No, when light-winged toys
 Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
 My speculative and officed instruments,
 That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
 Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,

And all indign and base adversities
 Make head against my estimation.
 [*Othello* 1.3.260-274]

Othello dismisses Cupid as a mere 'toy', the childlike image of those 'young affects' which he is mature enough to subject to the 'business' of the state. He sees sexual desire, 'heat', as inferior to and controlled by 'mind'. But, as Bruce Thornton points out and as the tragedy of *Othello* dramatizes, Eros/Cupid is 'a representation of how sex attacks the mind'.¹⁰⁷ The Othello who lapses into babbling incoherence in Act Four - 'Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief?' (*Othello* 4.1.41-42) - is barely recognisable as the poised and confident orator who sways the Venetian senate with his eloquence. His degeneration is Cupid's punishment for *hubris*. The *nemesis* that inevitably follows takes the form of jealousy, 'the green-eyed monster which doth mock | The meat it feeds on' (*Othello* 3.3.170-171). M.R. Ridley finds in these lines a reference to 'a malignant monster, advancing from without to ravage the victim's heart (like Prometheus' eagle) and mocking the victim as it feeds',¹⁰⁸ but they are arguably more suggestive of the habits of harpies. Even the curious epithet, 'green-eyed' fits this reading: daughters of Poseidon, harpies were associated with the sea and might therefore be assumed to have sea-green eyes. Indeed, an illustration in *Mythical Beasts* depicts a seventeenth century representation of a harpy with strikingly light-coloured, exophthalmic eyes.¹⁰⁹ Donna Hamilton notes that the

¹⁰⁷ Thornton, p.13.

¹⁰⁸ *Othello*, ed. By M.R. Ridley (London : Methuen, 1958), p.103.

¹⁰⁹ King, p.149.



allegorist Cristoforo Landino interpreted the harpy episode in *The Aeneid* as signifying 'the vice of avarice',¹¹⁰ a passion which may be said to 'mock' its victims since however great their possessions they are forever unsatisfied. Even more significant, especially in the context of *Othello*, is the verse accompanying the emblem of the harpy in *Minerva Britannia*:

Of Virgins face, with images and tallents strong
 Upon thy table, PHINEUS, here behold,
 A monstrous *Harpie*, that hath praied long,
 Upon thy meates, while thou art blind and old
 And at all times, his appetite doth serve,
 While unregarded, thou thy self dost sterve
 The Courtes of Kings, are said to keep a crew
 Of these still-hungry for their private gaine;
 The first is he, that carries tales untrue,
 The second, whome base bribing doth maintaine,
 The third and last, the Parasite I find
 Who bites the worst, if Princes will be blind.¹¹¹

This harpy, it will be noted, 'bites' his victim, as well 'praie[ing] [---] upon [his] meates'; parasites consume their patrons' wealth and secretly scoff at their blindness. The reference to Phineus recalls the story of the Thracian king of that name whom the harpies tormented by stealing or defiling all his food and the lines are addressed to rulers beset by greedy and deceitful courtiers. As well as parasites and flatterers, however, the verse identifies two other kinds of courtly harpy, bearers of false witness and takers of bribes. The latter are harpy-like in their rapacity; the tale-bearers pollute reputations as harpies

¹¹⁰ Donna B. Hamilton, *Virgil and 'The Tempest': The Politics of Imitation* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1990), p.75.

¹¹¹ Lindley, ed. *The Tempest*, p.27.

pollute their victim's food with excrement. The emblem is a warning against extortioners and sycophants: Iago, the supposedly-loyal 'ancient' deceiving his chief-of-staff with foul slanders in the hope of promotion, is both. The jealousy he arouses in Othello first contaminates his love for Desdemona, turning it into a 'cistern for foul toads/to knot and gender in' [*Othello* 4.2 63-64] and then destroys him.

In one of their manifestations harpies, as we have seen, bear a close resemblance to early images of Cupid, and both love and jealousy are forces of *eros*, the 'excessive passion [which is] fundamentally a form of insanity, a destruction of the rational mind's control over the body, a suspension of reason's power that allows the soul to be overwhelmed by the chaos of the natural appetites and emotion'.¹¹² *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dramatizes the comic effects of this passion, as 'knaveish' Cupid drives the lovers and Titania 'mad' through the agency of Puck (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.3 28-29) and the love-juice. Cupid's agent in *Othello* is Iago, the false-tale-bearer *par excellence*. The relationship between them is adumbrated in his first soliloquy, in which he forms the germ of his plan of revenge on the general for appointing Cassio as his lieutenant, and which ends with the ominous words, 'It is ingendered. Hell and Night | Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' [*Othello* 1.3 395-396]. In one version of the myth, Cupid is the child of Night and Erebus.¹¹³ Just as Puck anoints the lovers' eyes with Love-in-Idleness so that they cannot distinguish between reality and imagination, so

¹¹² Thornton, p.17.

¹¹³ Thornton, p.13.

the ‘poison’ [*Othello* 3.3 329] of Iago’s lies and innuendos acts upon Othello’s ‘speculative and officed instruments’ [*Othello* 1.3 240], distorting his perception of Desdemona and, with cruel irony, transforming the very qualities which make her loveable, courage and charm, into signs of immodesty and deception.

When the couple meet on Cyprus, Othello’s first words to his bride are, ‘O my fair warrior!’ (*Othello* 2.1.183). He greets her as an Amazon in affectionate tribute to her courage in braving the perils of a sea-voyage to follow him to the wars. It was the same spirit which prompted her to take the initiative in their wooing, to enter into an unconventional marriage without her father’s consent and to defend her actions before the Venetian senate:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
 My downright violence and storm of fortunes
 May trumpet to the world. My heart’s subdued
 Even to the very quality of my lord.
 I saw Othello’s visage in his mind,
 And to his honours and his valiant parts
 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate;
 So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
 The rites for why I love him are bereft me,
 And I a heavy interim shall support
 By his dear absence. [*Othello* 1.3.248-259]

This young Venetian gentlewoman from a sheltered and privileged background displays the positive characteristics of Amazons which came to be recognised in early modern times, especially in the iconography surrounding Queen Elizabeth I. She retains her fortitude and strength of mind in adversity,

and even after Othello has stormed at her over the loss of the handkerchief, she reproaches herself for unsoldierly weakness:

Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was - unhandsome warrior as I am -
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborned the witness,
And he's indicted falsely. [*Othello* 3.4.149-152]

Under Iago's influence, however, Othello identifies these admirable qualities as symptoms of the Amazon's transgressive sexuality, the untameable female *eros* which cannot be contained within the bond of marriage or restrained by patriarchal authority:

O curse of marriage.
That we can call these delicate creatures ours
And not their appetites! [*Othello* 3.3.272-274]

Othello can claim, like Theseus, to have won his bride with his sword, or, at any rate, with the story of his martial exploits, 'of battles, sieges [and] hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach' (*Othello* 1.2.129-135) though their relationship is perhaps more like that of Nausicaa and Odysseus, the King's daughter and the mysterious stranger who comes out of the sea and charms her with tales of travel and adventure, of far-away places and strange creatures.¹¹⁴ Othello's love for Desdemona is charted in terms of sea imagery. On their wedding night, he assures Iago,

¹¹⁴ *Odyssey*, VI

But that I love the gentle Desdemona
 I would not my unhoused free condition
 Put into circumscription and confine
 For the sea's worth. [*Othello* 1.2.25-28]

Their arrival on Cyprus follows a 'desperate tempest' (2.1.21) which disperses the Turkish fleet and separates the ships bearing Othello, Desdemona and Cassio, a foretaste of bitter divisions to come brought about by Iago's treachery. Cassio's comments on the reasons for Othello's survival of the storm, 'His barque is stoutly timbered, and his pilot | Of very expert and approved allowance' (*Othello* 2.1.49-50) may be seen as a metaphor for the Moor's state of mind at this stage of the play, when his emotions are still guided and directed by reason; later, when Iago has incited him to fury at the supposed adultery of his wife and friend, his passions become as powerful and uncircumscribed as the sea itself:

Like to the Pontic Sea,
 Whose icy current and compulsive source
 Ne'er knows retiring ebb, but keeps due on
 To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
 Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace
 Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
 Till that a capable and wide revenge
 Swallow them up. [*Othello* 3.4.456-463]

'Them' seems to refer both to Desdemona and Cassio and to the speaker's own 'bloody thoughts', suggesting that vengeance is not only destructive but also self-destructive, engulfing victim and perpetrator alike. Finally, when his misplaced revenge has run its course, Othello sees death as the ultimate landfall:

Here is my journey's end, here is my butt
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail. [*Othello* 5.2.274-275]

Though they precede an outburst of bitter self-reproach, the lines are curiously serene; death is pictured not as a violent shipwreck but as arrival in harbour, and the reference to a 'sea-mark' suggests that the pilot is once more at the helm. The image is reminiscent of Odysseus' landing, while fast asleep, in the haven of Phorkys:

There two precipitous
promontories opposed jut out, to close in the harbour
and shelter it from the big waves made by the winds blowing
so hard on the outside; inside, the well-benched vessels
can lie without being tied up, once they have found their
anchorage.¹¹⁵

Othello, however, fails to recognise his wife as a faithful Penelope and instead comes to see her as a siren, the personification, in Helen King's terms, of 'dangerous femininity',¹¹⁶ or, in the eleventh-century Marbod of Rennes' more lurid phraseology, 'the honied poisons, the sweet songs and the pull of the dark depths'.¹¹⁷ Odysseus' encounter with the sirens is one of the most memorable episodes in Book XII of the *Odyssey*; Circe warns him of their wiles and the threat they pose to unwary sailors:

¹¹⁵ *Odyssey* XIII, 97-101.

¹¹⁶ King, p.146.

¹¹⁷ King, p.146.

You will come first of all to the Sirens, who are enchanters of all mankind and whoever comes their way; and that man who unsuspecting approaches them, and listens to the Sirens singing, has no prospect of coming home and delighting his wife and little children as they stand about him in greeting but the Sirens by the melody of their singing enchant him. They sit in their meadow, but the beach before it is piled with bone heaps of men now rotted away, and the skins shrivel upon them.¹¹⁸

So seductive is their song that, despite the menace conveyed by their victims' decomposing corpses, Odysseus can resist its attraction only by having himself lashed to the mast and stopping his crew's ears with wax.¹¹⁹ Desdemona, too, is 'an admirable musician' (*Othello* 4.1.184); she 'sings [and] plays [...] well' (*Othello* 3.3.187) and, according to Othello, her voice has something of the siren's enchanting quality: 'O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear!' (*Othello* 4.1.184-185). Musical accomplishment and charm are admirable qualities and, as Othello admits, 'Where virtue is, these are more virtuous' [*Othello* 3.3 190]. Once Iago persuades him, however, that, as an unchaste wife, 'she's the worst for all this', [*Othello* 4.1 187] all her attractions are contaminated and defiled by her supposed adultery. Even her preference for Othello above all her other suitors is made to seem something foul and unnatural:

Not to affect many proposèd matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,

¹¹⁸ *Odyssey*, XII, 39-46.

¹¹⁹ *Odyssey*, XII, 173-179.

Whereto we see in all things nature tends -
 Foh! one may smell, in such, a will most rank [...]
 [*Othello* 3.3.234-237]

To Othello, Desdemona has become a fatally seductive siren: to Iago, she is a stinking harpy.

As we have seen, sirens were associated not only with harpies but also with mermaids. As well as the siren-like characteristics of singing and luring sailors to their death on rocks or sand-banks, these sea-maidens were credited with the power to raise or subdue storms,¹²⁰ a power which Cassio playfully ascribes to Desdemona, on hearing of her safe arrival at Cyprus:

Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
 The guttered rocks and congregated sands,
 Traitors ensteeped to enclog the guiltless keel,
 As having sense of beauty do omit
 Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
 The divine Desdemona. [*Othello* 2.1.69-74]

The allusion is apt and witty but oblique: Cassio does not make a direct comparison between his commanding officer's bride and a mermaid; to do so would be offensive, as 'mermaid' was an early-modern cant word for a prostitute. It is Othello himself who in Act 4 scene 2 - commonly referred to as the Brothel Scene - likens his wife to a 'public commoner' (*Othello* 4.2.75) a 'strumpet' (*Othello* 4.2.84) and a 'cunning whore' (*Othello* 4.2.91). Norman

¹²⁰ King, pp. 155-156.

Sanders, in his introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Othello* rightly asserts that ‘the whole play is founded on the different ways a single object may be viewed because of divergent human perspectives, interpretations and natural predilections’.¹²¹ In this scene Othello’s perception of his wife and that of the audience are diametrically opposite: they know her to be faithful and chaste; he sees her as no better than a prostitute, her maidservant as a bawd and his house as a brothel. What is so shocking about this scene is Othello’s inability to see what is perfectly obvious to everyone else, on stage and off. The sign for a brothel throughout Renaissance Europe was Blind Cupid. Here it is Othello who is blind: those ‘speculative [...] instruments’ which, he boasted to the Senate, could not be ‘seel[ed]’ by ‘feathered Cupid’ (*Othello* 1.3.269-270) are rendered inoperative by the ‘green-eyed monster’, jealousy (*Othello* 3.3.170). Helena, it will be remembered, attributes Cupid’s blindness to the fact that ‘Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind’; Othello’s mind has been abused by what Iago ironically refers to as his ‘medicine’ (*Othello* 4.1.43), the toxic blend of suggestion, misrepresentation and downright invention which has dulled his intellect, clouded his judgement and poisoned his imagination, so that ‘Trifles light as air | [seem] confirmations strong | As proofs of holy writ’ (*Othello* 3.3.326-328).

The particular ‘trifle’ to which Iago is referring in these lines is the handkerchief, accidentally found by Emilia, around which he improvises an

¹²¹ *Othello*, ed. by Norman Sanders (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.29.

elaborate farrago of deceptions involving Desdemona, Cassio and Bianca which convinces Othello of his wife's adultery though, to a rational, critical observer such as George Bernard Shaw it is patently 'an artificially manufactured and desperately precarious trick [...] which a chance word might upset at any moment'.¹²² In some ways this handkerchief is comparable with Love-in-Idleness: both are endowed with magical properties; both have a romantic history, the flower stained by 'love's wound' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.167), the napkin 'dyed in mummy which the skilful | Conserved of maidens' hearts' (*Othello* 3.4.73-74). Most significantly, both affect the powers of perception: the juice of the flower makes Lysander, Demetrius and Titania fall instantly in love; the handkerchief incites Othello to murderous hatred: 'let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand' (*Othello* 4.1.177-179). As Jonathan Bate points out, the handkerchief also has some properties in common with the shirt of Nessus, 'a charmed object which is supposed to subdue the partner entirely to the love of the person who gives it but in fact becomes the mechanism through which the lovers are destroyed'.¹²³ The parallel is persuasive, and may be extended to include Nessus, Deianira and Hercules as mythic counterparts to Iago, Desdemona and Othello, vindictive schemer, unwitting instrument and heroic victim.

¹²² Quoted in Bate, p.285.

¹²³ Bate, p.182.

Nessus apart, centaurs play an important role, dramatically and thematically in *Othello*. There are, for instance, two occasions on which wedding celebrations are interrupted by violent affrays, recalling the story of Pirithous' marriage feast. Of course, riotous behaviour at a wedding does not, in itself, invite comparison with the Lapithocentauromachy - François Laroque sees the 'public uproar raised by Iago' in Act 1 as an instance of 'charivari, better known in England under the names of the 'rough music', 'Skimmington riding' or 'riding the stang'¹²⁴ - but in each case there are specific references which, I believe, point fairly conclusively towards Theseus' epic struggle with the savage monsters who, according to Helen King, 'threaten the ordered exchanges on which society is based: the exchange of women, and guest-friendship'.¹²⁵ Thus we are told, twice, that Othello and Desdemona are spending their wedding-night at 'the Sagittary' (*Othello* 1.1.160; 1.3.115), that is, at 'a house or inn [...] so called because of its sign of Sagittarius or Centaur'.¹²⁶ Moreover, Iago's warning to Brabantio depicts his daughter's marriage as a monstrous coupling between a human being and a horse:

Because we come to do you service and you think we are ruffians you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans'. [*Othello* 1.1.111-115]

¹²⁴ François Laroque : *Shakespeare's Festive World : Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press; pb. edn. 1993), p.287.

¹²⁵ King, p.141.

¹²⁶ Sanders, ed. *Othello*, p.62n.

Similarly, when a drunken brawl breaks out during Othello's first night on Cyprus, Iago places the incident in the context of a wedding:

Friends all but now, even now,
In quarter and in terms like bride and groom
Divesting them for bed; and then but now -
As if some planet had unwitting men -
Swords out, and tilting one at others' breasts
In opposition bloody'. [*Othello* 2.3.172-177]

The image of marital harmony degenerating into violence both prefigures the story of Othello and Desdemona and recalls the tale of Pirithous and Hippodame.

It is Cassio's response to his drunken indiscretion, however, that most strikingly explores the significance of the centaur myth and its relevance to *Othello*: 'O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts!' (*Othello* 3.1.284-286). Centaurs were particularly susceptible to alcohol. It was the scent of Pholus' wine that incited the mountain centaurs to attack Hercules, and Eurytus, who initiated the fight at the Lapith wedding, 'with wyne farre over charged' was inflamed by drunken frenzy.¹²⁷ The same inebriation reduces the urbane Michael Cassio to the level of a brawling hooligan. For G.S. Kirk, centaurs represent 'the polarity of Nature and Culture'¹²⁸ formulated by the Greek sophists under the heading of

¹²⁷ Golding, p.247.

¹²⁸ G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p.207.

physis and *nomos*. Cassio's self-reproach - 'Reputation, reputation, reputation - O, I ha lost my reputation, I ha lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial!' (*Othello* 2.3.256-258) - expresses a similar polarity. His 'reputation', like his 'brain', is a distinctively human attribute; without intelligence, without the respect and recognition of his peers, he is no more than an animal. The incident brings home to him what C.M. Bowra regards as the true meaning of the Lapithocentaureomachy, that mankind is engaged in a constant struggle against 'the element of the beast which still thrives in humanity'.¹²⁹ Not only alcohol but passion can arouse the beast in man; enraged at his officers' undisciplined behaviour, Othello warns,

Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion, having my best judgement collied,
Essays to lead the way. (*Othello* 2.3.197-200).

At this stage, he is able to control his anger but later, as Iago's 'poison' works upon him, Othello's 'safer guides' are completely overruled by passion and he undergoes what Jonathan Bate describes as a 'bestial metamorphosis'.¹³⁰ As Bate points out, 'Actaeon stands for all who are destroyed by sexuality';¹³¹ *eros*, in the form of obsessive jealousy, transforms Othello into 'a monster and a beast' (*Othello* 4.1.60). However, whilst Actaeon's metamorphosis is physical and external, Othello undergoes a process of psychological change in

¹²⁹ C.M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (London : Orion, 1994), p.117.

¹³⁰ Bate, p.184.

¹³¹ Bate, p.184.

which, as Norman Sanders argues, ‘his outstanding [...] virtues become parodies of themselves’:¹³²

Othello’s immense capacity for total personal commitment to an ideal leads him to make romantic love the cornerstone of his marriage and his existence; but this same characteristic causes him to react violently to the belief that he was wrong in so doing. [...] Decisiveness becomes rash action; emotional engagement turns into ruthless obsession; automatic active response to a crisis is transformed into a capacity for murder.¹³³

The source of this moral metamorphosis is, as Sanders claims, romantic love which ‘becomes its own disease’.¹³⁴ The mythological allusions in *Othello* provide a poetic vehicle for this process. A.C. Bradley claims that this play differs from the other great Shakespearean tragedies in that it lacks ‘the power of dilating the imagination by vague suggestions of huge universal powers working in the world of individual fate and passion’.¹³⁵ It is my contention that the subtextual presence of harpies, sirens, amazons and centaurs provides just such a mythic context for the action and reinforces the play’s image of the human condition as a struggle between culture and nature, reason and transgressive passion, *nomos* and *eros*.

Mary Innes rightly observes that ‘the remark of the contemporary critic Meres, that “the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous honey-tongued

¹³² Sanders, p.29.

¹³³ Sanders, p.29.

¹³⁴ Sanders, p.23.

¹³⁵ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on ‘Hamlet’, ‘Othello’, ‘King Lear’, ‘Macbeth’* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p.185.

Shakespeare”, might suggest that it was the Ovidian spirit, rather than his matter, that was to be recognised in Shakespeare’s pages: but the direct influence of Ovid can be discerned too’.¹³⁶ One sign of this influence is the fact that, in Shakespeare as in Ovid, metamorphosis has, in Charles Martindale’s words, ‘a profound if obscure psychological significance’.¹³⁷ Martindale’s comment refers specifically to the Story of Daphne, whose transformation is brought about directly by Cupid’s spite. Jonathan Bate’s analysis of the allusions to this episode in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* identifies the precise nature of this psychological significance:

Take Cupid’s bow and his blindness literally and human beings are arbitrary victims of love. Ovid does not take Cupid and the other love-gods quite so seriously: he uses them to show his reader something about the capriciousness of love [---]. The Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* goes even further than Ovid: he invites us to consider the possibility that the love-gods are no more than a dream, something we invent to help us to understand erotic love, which comes wholly from within.¹³⁸

The power of *eros*, whether figured in the taloned monster of the Assisi mural or in Mercutio’s ‘blind bow-boy’ [*Romeo and Juliet* 2.3 15] – the Renaissance equivalent of a toddler with a kalashnikov – is an inner compulsion, not an external deity, and the metamorphoses it brings about are also internal. ‘Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind’ and what it transforms is not the body but the imagination, distorting perception and clouding judgement. Thus the monsters it

¹³⁶ Mary Innes ed. *Metamorphosis*, p.23

¹³⁷ Martindale ed. *Ovid Renewed*, p.4.

¹³⁸ Bate, pp. 134-135.

creates are no less bizarre than Actaeon or Hermaphroditus and all the stranger for remaining patently – and disturbingly – human.

III

Before I can make out a case to Kate, it seems to me, I have to be able to make out a case to myself [----]

Odd, [----] all these dealings of mine with myself. First I've agreed a principle with myself, now I'm making out a case to myself, and debating my own feelings and intentions with myself. Who is this self, this phantom internal partner, with whom I am entering into all these arrangements? (I ask myself)

Well, who am I talking to now? Who is the ghostly audience for the long tale I tell through every minute of the day? The silent judge, sitting, face shrouded, in perpetual closed session? Sometimes I think there's something recognizable about the way he listens. It's Kate! It's God! It's my old history teacher! No, there's something even more familiar about him than that. It's some allotrope of myself who might have been me – and who might yet be, after he's heard what I have to say.

Michael Frayn *Headlong*

Chapter III

A Natural Perspective: The Double Self

Sebastian's entrance in Act 5 of *Twelfth Night* is the moment the audience has been waiting for, half eagerly, half reluctantly, since his first appearance in Act 2. Scene 1, in the knowledge that the reunion of the shipwrecked twins will lead to a happy resolution of the plot complications and the end of the play. The on-stage witnesses to this scene, however, are faced, not with elucidation and closure, but with an apparent impossibility:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not
[*Twelfth Night* 5.1.213-214]

Orsino and Olivia see two Cesarios; Antonio sees one Sebastian miraculously split in two:

How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures. [5.1.220-222]

Properly staged, the moment has something of the same numinous quality as the revival of the 'statue' in *The Winter's Tale*. It is, in Olivia's words, 'most wonderful'. And as Sebastian turns to face his mirror-image, the play reaches its emotional climax. For it is the reunion of the twins, rather than the winding

up of the love-tangle, which is the high point of the play. In thirty lines of highly charged dialogue the brother and sister, parted by shipwreck, come to realise, with almost unbearable joy, that 'tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love (3.4.376). Their mutual recognition is like a restoration to life; indeed, Viola's injunction, 'Do not embrace me...' (an instruction which, as Stanley Wells points out, 'few directors and actors can resist the temptation to disobey')¹³⁹ recalls the risen Christ's words to Mary Magdalene, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father' [*John* 20.17].

For Viola and Sebastian, the confrontation is a reaffirmation of identity. It is the first time her name has been spoken in the play: before assuming the role of Cesario, she was merely a nameless stranger, snatched from the sea. Now, at last, she can resume her own appearance and her own name. Sebastian, too, having abandoned his assumed name, Roderigo, only to find himself addressed as Cesario, can now truly identify himself as Sebastian of Messaline's son and Viola's brother. By becoming twins again, each can become more fully him/herself. Their relationship is like the dual monster of Plato's *Symposium*, the perfect sphere symbolising unity, harmony and completeness, and their reunion is the means of bringing fulfilment to Orsino and Olivia. The perfectly 'matched' couple will create two other perfect matches in which the lovesick Duke and the infatuated Countess will each

¹³⁹ Stanley Wells, *Royal Shakespeare: Four Major Productions at Stratford-upon-Avon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p.61.

obtain 'what [they] will'.

To outsiders, however, identical twins seem 'monstrous' in another sense, as they apparently contravene the most fundamental law of nature, the existence of distinct and distinguishable boundaries between one human being and another. Montaigne propounds this law with his usual lucidity:

As no event and no shape entirely resembles another, so none is wholly different from another. An ingenious mixture on nature's part! If our faces were not like, we could not discern a man from a beast. If they were not unlike, we could not distinguish one man from another man.¹⁴⁰

'One face and two persons' creates problems of identity as well as identification, just as the centaurs, mermaids and satyrs of myth and the ass-headed Bottom and horned Falstaff question the limits of the human. As G.R. Elliott comments, in a seminal essay on *The Comedy of Errors*, 'all normal persons set so much store by human individuality that they shrink from the thought of its being submerged'.¹⁴¹ The instinctive repugnance felt by many people at the prospect of human cloning reflects this profound sense of what Elliott calls the 'real horror [which] attaches to the notion of the complete identity of two human beings'.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Montaigne, III, p.328.

¹⁴¹ G R Elliott, 'Weirdness in *The Comedy of Errors*' in *Shakespeare's Comedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* ed by Laurence Lerner (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1994), pp. 19-29 (p.19).

¹⁴² Elliott, p.19.

In *Twelfth Night*, as the audience knows perfectly well, the two ‘Cesarios’ are not identical, not even of the same sex. Nevertheless, to Orsino and Antonio, they create problems of identity and perception which challenge the most fundamental principles by which we organise experience and come to terms with the world. The philosopher, Mary Margaret McCabe, defines these principles in terms of what she calls ‘individuation’:

When we try to arrange the world of our experience (whether sensory or intellectual), we suppose that certain items are basic. What is more, we imagine that basic items are countable, one by one. Further, we hope that each basic item is somehow or other one, unified, coherent within itself. On that account, something will be individual because it is basic, unitary and unified.¹⁴³

McCabe propounds four characteristics of individuals. They must be

1. basic
2. one for counting (a unit)
3. unified
4. self-identical and different from others.¹⁴⁴

Transgenic creatures such as satyrs and centaurs fail to qualify as 1 and 3, twins as 2 and 4. Both Antonio and Orsino find it impossible either to distinguish between ‘Cesario’ and Sebastian or to count them. Orsino sees ‘One face, one voice, one habit and two persons’ (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.213).

¹⁴³ Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato’s Individuals* (Princeton New Jersey, : Princeton University Press, 1994), p.3.

¹⁴⁴ McCabe, p.3.

Understandably, he attributes the phenomenon to some kind of optical illusion ('a natural perspective': 5.1.214). Antonio finds the normal conventions of syntax fail him as he struggles to reconcile singular and plural forms of noun and verb: '*an* apple cleft in *two* is [---] *twin*' (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.221). The problem is both linguistic and ontological: does an apple divided into halves remain one (halved) apple or become two half-apples? McCabe uses a similar example to explain Aristotle's unitary theory:

Suppose I try to count a collection of things. [...] I need [...] some way of determining what is the unit for my count. So to count apples, I need an apple as a unit [...]. I must first of all know what it is that I am counting (apples, not pips or segments of apple); and, second, I must identify the unit so described.¹⁴⁵

A pair of twins may be regarded either as two individuals or as a single (individual) unit. The syntactical status of the word 'twins' reflects this ambiguity of individuation. 'Antipholus is a twin; Antipholus and Dromio are twins'. Both statements are factually and syntactically accurate, yet the second is misleading. Without further qualification, the complement, 'twins', implies a pair or set of twins. Thus it cannot be seen as a simple plural. However, it is not one of those nouns such as 'trousers' and 'scissors' which though plural in form are grammatically singular, since it does exist in a singular form: one can speak of one twin but not of one trouser.

If Shakespeare's twins are to be counted as two units, then, according to Montaigne's view of nature, they should be distinguishable from one another,

¹⁴⁵ McCabe, p.12.

if as one, then, with their duplication of faces, voices and habits, they challenge the concept of human individuality. For the twins themselves, however, their duality is wholly natural and unproblematic and it is separation which seems strange and threatening. When Viola refers to herself as ‘poor monster’ (1.5.34), the context indicates that she is thinking mainly about her male disguise, but the precise nature of that disguise stems in part from her desire to retain a sense of herself as a twin by dressing like her brother; ‘Cesario’ is both Viola and Sebastian. The price she pays for this is the loss of her own identity. Sebastian, too, changes his name when he is divided from his sister, (though the exigencies of the plot require that he reverses this in his very first scene) only to find himself apparently recognised by complete strangers and addressed familiarly by an unfamiliar name. As Viola becomes Orsino’s ‘dear lad’ (1.4.29) so her brother becomes Olivia’s ‘dear Cesario’ (4.1.49). As Cesario, Viola’s enigmatic claim,

I am all the daughters of my father’s house,
And all the brothers too (*Twelfth Night* 2.5.120-121)

is literally true, though, as herself, she is expressing her pathetic attempt to take on her twin’s personality and masculine role.

As John Lash points out, the etymology of the word ‘twin’ denotes ‘both union and separation, joining and parting’.¹⁴⁶ Having been separated from her ‘other half’ Viola attempts to unite both Sebastian and herself in the person of

¹⁴⁶ quoted in Penelope Farmer, *Two or The Book of Twins and Doubles: An Autobiographical Anthology* (London : Virago, 1996) p.3.

Cesario. Thus, the moment of reunion in Act 5 is, for her, also a moment of division. At last, she can cast off the burden of maintaining a dual personality along with her 'masculine, usurp'd attire' (5.1.248), and once more claim her true identity, though it is surely significant that though she and Sebastian use her real name the Duke continues to address her as 'boy' (5.1.265) and 'Cesario' (5.1.381). As the play ends, Viola is ready to take on a new role as 'Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen' (5.1.384). She is able to do so only after she has resumed her own true identity and it is her twin, not Orsino, who has made this possible.

As Viola and Sebastian repeat each other's names -- 'Such a Sebastian was my brother' (5.1.231); 'Thrice welcome, drowned Viola' (5.1.239) -- their mutual gaze affirms their sense of shared and individual identity. Sebastian looks at Viola and sees himself: 'Do I stand there?' (5.1.224); Viola looks at Sebastian and sees the image which has been 'living in her glass' (3.4.172). Dromio of Ephesus finds the face-to-face encounter with his long-lost twin a similarly self-affirming experience:

Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother;
I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth
[*The Comedy of Errors* 5.1.420-421]

though hitherto he has shown no evidence of existential angst as a result of their separation. For Antipholus of Syracuse, however, the loss of his brother is a source of profound psychological unease. Like Viola and Sebastian they were parted by shipwreck, and the image of a single drop of water lost in the

vast immensity of the sea movingly conveys his feelings of vulnerability and estrangement:

He that commends me to my own account
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself. [1.2.33-40]

The state of mind depicted in these lines corresponds closely to failure to come to terms with what Freud calls the 'Reality Principle', which asserts that 'successful maturation requires the establishment of a boundary between the self and everything else, and if this development is arrested or delayed it is impossible for the afflicted individual to play a significant part in social life'.¹⁴⁷ Even before complete strangers begin to claim him as a friend, wife, brother-in-law, client, lover, Antipholus' sense of his own distinct and separate identity is fragile. 'Confounds' (from Latin *con-fundere*, to pour together) exactly denotes both the state of an individual droplet in an expanse of water and the speaker's fear of losing all sense of selfhood. As the action of the play progresses, he finds his fears terrifyingly confirmed. Ironically, the more inhabitants of Ephesus (mis)recognise him as his twin, the more convinced he becomes that he is becoming simply unrecognisable, not a single, stable personality but a series of unrelated personae arbitrarily defined by other people, an angry wife, a beautiful girl, an importunate goldsmith - even, apparently, his own slave. In his first scene, we see Antipholus of Syracuse using Dromio, born on the same

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Miller, *On Reflection* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1998), p.160.

day as himself, as a kind of surrogate twin: 'Here comes the almanac of my true date' (1.2.31). Unfortunately, as this is the wrong Dromio, the subsequent confusions and cross-purposes, far from confirming his identity, seem at best ill-judged humour and at worst symptoms of the witchcraft and trickery for which Ephesus is notorious.

Twice in the space of ten lines, he uses the phrase 'lose myself' (1.2.30 and 40), linking the aimless wanderings of a sightseer in a strange city with his restless, rootless quest for his missing brother. The repetition of the phrase, in this context, invites us to question his words: what, exactly, is the 'self' that Antipholus is in danger of losing? *My* self implies something other than *me*; the possessor cannot be the same as the thing possessed. And, unlike modern English, sixteenth-century syntax permitted both usages (e.g. 'rouse *him* at the name of Crispian': *Henry V* 4.3.43). In his otherwise detailed analysis of Shakespearean grammar, N.F. Blake does not refer specifically to the use of the reflexive pronoun; however, on pronouns in general he comments, 'the context has to be taken into consideration to see whether Shakespeare was exploiting the conditions of the language to draw attention to a particular relationship'.¹⁴⁸ With this criterion in mind, then, it is surely safe to assume that 'self' in this instance is the awareness of individuality, that which prevents one from being 'confounded' with the rest of humanity. For a twin, as we saw in the case of Viola and Sebastian, the sense of self is closely bound up with the identical Other. Antipholus, who has not seen his twin since birth,

¹⁴⁸ N.F. Blake, *Shakespeare's Language: An Introduction* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1983), p.79.

can have no such sense. He cannot be 'content' because he feels he has no content -- no inner reality.

A man without a self is rather like the figure in the Magritte painting *La Reproduction Interdite* who is depicted from the rear looking into a mirror which reflects the back of his head. Again and again in Shakespeare's representation of twins, the image of the looking glass is used to express their sense of identity in duality. Viola sees Sebastian 'living in [her] glass'

(*Twelfth Night* 3.4.372), Dromio's twin is his glass. What a mirror shows, however, is not an identical reproduction of the observer but a reverse image. The Messalian twins are of opposite sexes; the Antipholi are complementary in temperament though identical in appearance. Whereas the Syracusan is introspective, passive and inclined to melancholy, his Ephesian alter-ego is a choleric, assertive extrovert. Superficially he seems more mature and self-sufficient than his brother, head of a household, a well-known figure in the town, yet his accumulation of social roles, householder, husband, soldier, lover, master, friend, patron, customer, may suggest a rather panicky desire to find 'content' in the number and variety of his interactions with his society. In the course of the play each brother experiences his worst nightmare: Antipholus of Syracuse finds himself being absorbed into the busy, bewildering world of Ephesus like a drop in the ocean, whilst his counterpart is locked out of his own house and arrested as a law-breaker.

His words on being denied entry to his home are significant: 'What art thou that keep'st me from the house I owe?' (3.1.42). It is a characteristic of this

Antipholus that he defines his house primarily in terms of property. Similarly, of all the crimes of which he could be accused theft is the one most calculated to appal him, since he has a strong sense of ownership and indeed tends to regard all interpersonal transactions in contractual and mercantile terms. The very chain which he is accused of stealing is a symbol of this: intended as a gift for his wife, it is withdrawn when she seems unmindful of her obligations and given to the courtesan in exchange for a ring. Like the purses of gold given to the slaves it is a form of currency, which Antipholus uses to purchase conjugal harmony, sexual favours and social status. In the event, it becomes the means of his social disgrace, the loss of face in becoming 'a loathsome abject scorn' (4.4.104), which amounts to loss of self. Repudiated as a husband, defied as a master, condemned as a thief and confined as a lunatic, he sees all his carefully constructed social roles subverted and only the timely arrival of his twin restores his equilibrium -- and with it, his confidence in the principle of *quid pro quo*. His last words in the play are a response to the courtesan's request that he return her ring: 'There, take it, and much thanks for my good cheer' (5.1.395). Clearly Antipholus of Ephesus is not changed by his distressing experience or by reunion with his twin. If his marriage is happier in future, it will be thanks to Adriana, assuming that she abides by the Abbess's advice. Indeed, the meeting of the Antipholi is curiously anticlimactic and it is left to their servants to conclude the play, touchingly hand in hand, 'like brother and brother' (5.1.428). Syracusan Antipholus, having at last attained the object of his quest, is strangely reticent about his feelings. As Ralph Berry points out: 'We do not know what he makes of his long lost brother in the end, for he does not tell us; by then it is clear that his

most important relationship is with Luciana, his sexual complement. It is Luciana that satisfies his drive towards identity'.¹⁴⁹

This transference is not made, however, without great trepidation. Attracted as he is, he at first associates love with yet further loss of selfhood, linking Luciana with that sea which has literally lost him his brother and mother and metaphorically represents his fear of dissolution:

O train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note
To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears.
Sing, Siren, for thyself, and I will dote.
Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs,
And in that glorious supposition think
He gains by death that hath such means to die.
Let love, being light, be drownèd if she sink. [3.2.45-52]

In the notes to his Arden edition of the play R.A. Foakes discusses the erotic wordplay in this passage and its relevance to Antipholus' first soliloquy, commenting on the identification of sirens with mermaids and their association with sexual temptation. However, I would suggest that their primary significance in this context is as transgressive monsters, dissolving the boundaries between species (bird/fish/woman) and thus embodying Antipholus' deep-seated fear of the fluidity of identity. Ironically, the audience has already heard Luciana lecturing her sister on the impossibility of transgressing natural boundaries:

¹⁴⁹ Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1972), p.30.

**There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky. [2.1.16-17]**

Her reproachful reply to Antipholus' speech arises from the fact that she believes him to be her brother-in-law and thus that by wooing her he has overstepped such a natural boundary and hence the love he professes is not merely adulterous but incestuous. The scene is a comic episode of cross purposes and mistaken relationships, but out of its confusions Antipholus seizes a new sense of identity:

Luciana: Why call you me “love”? Call my sister so.
 Ant. of S: Thy sister’s sister.
 Luciana: That’s my sister.
 Ant. of S: No.
 It is thyself, mine own self’s better part,
 Mine eye’s clear eye, my dear heart’s dearer
 heart.
 Luciana: All this my sister is, or else should be.
 Ant. of S: Call thyself sister, sweet, for I am thee.
 [3.2.59-63]

Paradoxically, however, by grounding his sense of identity in Luciana, Antipholus has 'lost' himself: 'I *am* thee'. Adriana demonstrates the potentially destructive elements of such self-identification in her tirade (addressed, inevitably, to the wrong Antipholus) against her husband's infidelity:

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself? --
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That undividable, incorporate,

Am better than thy dear self's better part.
[2.2.122-126]

The possible consequence of such 'incorporation' is evident in Adriana's distress. It is she, not her errant husband, who suffers the sense of estrangement, the ontological anxiety which afflicted Syracusan Antipholus on his arrival in Ephesus. To emphasise the parallel between their mental and emotional states, Shakespeare uses the same image of dissolution in each case:

For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself, and not me too. [2.2.128-132]

Whereas, however, what Antipholus fears is the *anomie* of separation, Adriana suffers guilt and self-loathing born of total and permanent identification with a faithless and indifferent other:

I am possessed with an adulterate blot;
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.
For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion. [2.2.143-147]

This bitter reproach is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Biblical maxim that husband and wife are 'one flesh' (*Genesis* 2.24). Adriana's complaint is a comic *tour de force*, thirty-six lines of sarcastic scolding, sentimental appeal and hyperbolic accusation addressed not only to the wrong man - and a total stranger at that - but also to someone who, far from being indissolubly

incorporate with her, suffers from a chronic sense of emotional isolation. 'Plead you to me, fair dame?' Antipholus inquires politely at the end of this impassioned aria. Well may he ask.

However, this exchange is more than just one more instance of cross purposes and mistaken identity. The confrontation between unsatisfied emotional emptiness (absence of 'content') and stifling invasion of emotional space elucidates the major concern of *The Comedy of Errors*, the tension between identity and relationship, between the need for autonomy and the dread of *anomie*. By using the same image -- the drop of water dispersed in the sea -- to connote Antipholus of Syracuse's search for relatedness and Adriana's possessive self-identification with her husband, Shakespeare shows how these two troubled characters are mirror images of each other. This illustrates the difference between the treatment of twinship in this play and in *Twelfth Night*. The relationship between Viola and Sebastian is portrayed as unique and distinct from all other relationships in the play. Whether face to face in entranced mutual recognition, or side by side providing, as if by magic, a resolution of the tangled erotic yearnings of Orsino and Olivia, they are simultaneously a problem and a solution, a conundrum and a revelation. Stanley Wells beautifully describes the effect of the recognition scene in John Barton's Stratford production:

The silent moment of confrontation and recognition of the twin brother and sister is the climax of the play. This relationship is the one on which all the others depend. It has seemed impossible of revival, but the impossible has happened; we are in the presence of a miracle. The moment of happiness in Viola

and Sebastian spreads to the other characters on the stage, creating an emotional solvent in which their problems are resolved; and it spreads to the audience too.¹⁵⁰

This miraculous diffusion of happiness is possible precisely because Viola and Sebastian are twins: 'maid and man' (5.1.261), 'one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons' (5.1.213), 'Orsino's mistress' (5.1.384) and Olivia's husband. They also enjoy a unique, exclusive relationship which sets them apart from all the other *dramatis personae*. Barton emphasized this exclusivity in his blocking of the recognition scene:

The director helped his actors in every possible way. Lighting concentrated on Viola and Sebastian. Richard David in *Shakespeare Survey* referred to "the sudden freeze of motion and sound as lost sister confronts lost brother with all the other characters forgotten save the enigmatic Feste framed in the background between them".¹⁵¹

Nothing could possibly be more different from the meeting of the two sets of twins in *The Comedy of Errors*. On a crowded stage, the action bustles along, with one revelation following hard upon another in the space of 77 hectic lines and it is not until the plot has been wound up that the focus shifts, in a kind of dramatic coda, to the delighted confrontation of the Dromios. What we see at the end of this play, unlike *Twelfth Night*, is the reconstruction - the metaphorical rebirth - of an entire family, parents and children, husband and wife, masters and slaves as well as 'brother and brother' (5.1.428). From the first, Antipholus of Syracuse has been looking for his mother, as well as his

¹⁵⁰ Wells, p.60.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Wells, p.61.

twin. Ideas of relatedness and renewal link the play and its setting to St Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians* which is not only a source for Adriana's 'one flesh' speech but an extended meditation on the family as an image of the Church in which each individual finds himself both validated and made new, united in the Body of Christ and with Him raised from the dead:

And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespass and sins
[2.1]

For he is our peace who hath made both one [...] to make in
himself of twain one new man [...]. [2.14-15]

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but
fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. [...]
[2.19]

The text concludes with a number of maxims on the duties and responsibilities of all members of the extended family, including slaves, in which the individual members, 'being rooted and grounded in love' (3.17), find self-fulfilment, domestic harmony and incorporation in the body of Christians, which is also the Body of Christ:

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord
[5.22]

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that
loveth his wife loveth himself [6.1]

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters [...] with
good will doing service as to the Lord [...] [6.5-7]

And ye masters [...] [forbear] threatening: knowing that your
Master also is in heaven [6.9]

This may seem a heavy burden of ethical and theological significance for such a boisterous comedy to bear, but after the violent knockabout of Pinch's conjuring and the subsequent bedlam, as proliferating Dromios and Antipholi swarm onto the stage all clamouring to explain themselves, the Abbess's concluding speech introduces a note of joyful solemnity which embraces the whole society of Ephesus in celebrating the rebirth of her family after thirty-three years of labour with a second Christening:

The Duke, my husband, and my children both,
And you the calendars of their nativity,
Go to a gossip's feast, and joy with me
After so long grief, such festivity! [5.1.409]

Not for nothing are two of the principle topographical reference-points of the action called The Centaur and The Phoenix, symbols respectively of transgressive nature and miraculous renewal. The emphasis in this final scene is not so much on twinship as on the extended family (including a daughter-in-law and a potential daughter-in-law), integrated into the wider community. The Duke is the guest of honour at the 'gossips' feast' and all the citizens of Ephesus who have been embroiled in the 'sympathized one day's error' (5.1.400) are invited to share in the celebrations. It is this common movement towards social festivity which provides the context for the audience's last view of the Dromios in the two configurations characteristic of twinship, face to face in mutual contemplation and validation, and hand in hand, facing 'the world' in fraternal amity. Their gestures exactly represent the different strategies adopted by their masters to compensate for their separation: the Syracusan brother searches for, and eventually finds, a self-reflecting alter-

ego; the Ephesian seeks for self-identification in a number of transactional relationships.

The need for both subjective and objective affirmation of the self is not confined to twins, however. In *Man's Estate* Coppélia Kahn defines the duality inherent in all human personality:

Identity has two sides. One faces inward, to the core of the individual, to his own confidence in being uniquely himself, and in the consistency and stability of his self-image through space and time. The other looks outward, to his society; it rests on his confidence in being recognised by others *as* himself, in his ability to unify his self-image with a social role.¹⁵²

Again and again, in the plays and sonnets, Shakespeare returns to this theme of the divided self and of the need to find one's identity confirmed and validated by reflection. Narcissus is the perfect image of this need. Jonathan Bate notes 'the tissue of allusion to Narcissus in the first seventeen sonnets'¹⁵³ and comments:

Shakespeare knows that when you look in your lover's eyes, it is a reflection of yourself that you see. Where he had begun in Sonnet 3 by telling the youth to look in his mirror, he begins Sonnet 22 by looking in his own glass. Is love a reflection within of the 'thou', the beloved other perceived by the 'eye', or is it a projection outward of the 'I', the voracious self?¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.3.

¹⁵³ Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London and Basingstoke: Picador 1997), p.48.

¹⁵⁴ Bate, p.51.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona addresses this question, though it does not provide a satisfactory answer. Once again, much depends on the significance of the reflexive pronoun. Both Valentine and Proteus face what may be called crises of individuation as their love is put to the test and each finds a gap opening up between his internal, subjective self and his external, objective self, between 'the consistency and stability of his self-image' and 'his confidence in being recognised by others'.

Banished from Milan, Valentine sees separation from his beloved as a kind of death, a violent wrenching apart of the two sides of his identity:

To die is to be banished from myself,
And Silvia is my self. Banished from her
Is self from self, a deadly banishment.

[*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.171-173]

The typography of this speech, in the New Oxford edition, is revealing; as the reflexive pronoun is replaced by the possessive adjective, identification gives way to appropriation. (It may be argued that this is a purely visual cue to meaning and hence of no relevance in a dramatic text; however, it is possible to point the lines so as to make the distinction perceptible to the ear.) It is because he has come to regard Silvia as *his* self - rather than himself - that he can say, as a token of reconciliation with Proteus,

And that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee. [5.4.82-83]

The words are all the more shocking for the glib couplet form in which they are set. If the form is neat and precisely balanced, however, the sense is hard to construe. Is the qualifier 'that was mine' meant to reinforce or to limit the sense of 'all'? If we accept the former reading, Valentine appears to be asserting rights of absolute ownership over Silvia which constitute as great a violation of her personal integrity as Proteus' physical assault; if the latter (and the New Oxford punctuation seems to support this reading), he is making some totally meaningless distinction between that part of his mistress which is his to dispose of and the rest -- a sort of psycho-erotic judgement of Solomon. It is no wonder that Silvia does not speak throughout the rest of the scene. She presumably spends what remains of the play trying to determine whether her lover is a knave or a fool.

Valentine's 'voracious self' leads him to identify with and appropriate Silvia. Proteus' turns inward and threatens to tear him apart. Contemplating his new-found love for Silvia, he finds his identity being fragmented under the pressure of his divided loyalties as he begins to see himself both subjectively and objectively:

Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose:
 If I keep them I needs must lose myself.
 If I lose them, thus find I by their loss
 For Valentine, myself, for Julia, Silvia.
 I to myself am dearer than a friend,
 For love is still most precious in itself. [2.6.19-24]

One face, one voice, one habit and two identities! The feelings he formerly had for Julia and Valentine are associated with his subjective self whom he

calls 'I'. But he has become aware of a second identity -- 'myself' who can be objectified as a rival to Valentine, 'dearer than a friend'. It is this self that Proteus would have to sacrifice to remain true to his mistress and friend. The word 'love' in the last line of this passage is ambiguous: love for whom? Clearly not for Julia or Valentine; for Silvia, then? - or for 'myself'? We do not know, and perhaps Proteus does not know either. Valentine is equally unclear in the couplet in which he 'give[s]' Silvia to his friend 'that [his] love may appear plain and free'. The love in question may be for Proteus (magnanimous enough to forgive lying, betrayal and attempted rape) or Silvia (disinterested enough to surrender her to a rival); either way, the self-congratulatory tone reveals that it contains a strong element of self-love. Compared with this, Proteus' conclusion has at least the merit of directness:

I cannot now prove constant to myself
Without some treachery used to Valentine. [2.6.31-32]

The baroque rhetoric employed in the rest of the soliloquy, however, might suggest that the speaker is indulging in cynical logic-chopping in order to defend the indefensible. But it can be played in such a way as to retain the audience's sympathy, if not their approval, particularly if they pick up the echoes of Proteus' first soliloquy when, after Valentine has left for Milan, he comments ruefully:

He after honour hunts, I after love.
He leaves his friends to dignify them more,
I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love. [1.1.63-65]

The 'self' whom Proteus leaves for Julia's sake is clearly bound up in his relationship with Valentine. A distinction is being made here between the speaker's 'interior' self, which is validated by love and his 'exterior' self, validated by friendship. Already in the first scene of the play we have observed, in the conversation between the two young men leading up to Valentine's departure, that there is a strong element of competition mingled with the evident affection between them. Their dialogue is a lively contest of wit, full of puns, wordplay, allusion and ingenious argument and Proteus' first thought, after Valentine's exit, is to draw a comparison between them. When they meet in Milan they engage in another such exchange on the merits of their respective mistresses, and it seems that Proteus' love for Silvia springs in no small degree from the fact that she is his friend's choice. When he says that he has seen only her 'picture' (2.5.207) this is not literally true: he has already met the lady herself; but it is the image of her created by Valentine's praise which has attracted him and convinced him that she is a 'celestial sun' (2.6.10) compared to Julia's 'twinkling star' (2.6.9).

Appropriately, when Silvia rejects his suit, he asks for her picture:

Vouchsafe me yet your picture for my love
 For since the substance of your perfect self
 Is else devoted, I am but a shadow,
 And to your shadow will I make true love. [4.3.117-122]

Having sacrificed his exterior, active self for Julia's love and now repudiated that love, and with it his interior, affective self, Proteus now feels no more than a shadow, as insubstantial and two-dimensional as the image of Silvia

which he worships. Proteus is so called not merely because he is fickle but because he has no stable identity and his exclamation, in the final moments of the play, 'O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect' (5.4.109-110) is a belated recognition of the need to integrate the inner and outer sides of his personality, to be, in McCabe's terms, a 'unitary and unified' individual, not just unchanging but self-consistent. A comic parody of Proteus' psychic split is provided by the scene in which Silvia causes Valentine to write a letter to himself. Valentine is jealous of himself as a supposed rival for Silvia's love; Proteus sets up himself as an actual rival to Valentine for his own love: 'I to myself am dearer than a friend'. [2.6.23]

The two cases are mirror-images of one another, and indeed some of the inconsistencies of this delightful but flawed play can be explained if we think of it not only as a comedy of courtship, but also as an experimental twin play, exploring some of the themes of identity and duality worked out more fully in *The Comedy of Errors* and essaying the dramatic structure perfected in *Twelfth Night*. The eponymous gentlemen, like the pairs of twins in the later plays, having been separated, become involved in a complicated love plot which can be resolved only by their reunion in the last act. The confusions and mistakes of this play spring not from mistaken identity arising from external similarity but from the changes in Proteus' internal identity. When Valentine reveals the details of his projected elopement, he believes he is addressing the Proteus whom he left in Verona, Julia's lover and his faithful friend. Actually, as the audience knows, he is confiding in a different Proteus, his sworn rival in love for Silvia. The last act of the play seems to be an attempt to produce the effect

described by Stanley Wells of the closure of *Twelfth Night* with the 'twins' meeting face to face and then turning to their respective partners to form two couples. However, the reconciliation between the friends, comprising as it does Proteus' remorse and Valentine's 'gift' of Silvia, overshadows the subsequent resolution of the love plot. With the revelation of 'Sebastian's' true identity, the Duke's consent to his daughter's marriage, the rout of Thurio and pardon for the outlaws, Shakespeare has too much on his hands in the concluding eighty-seven lines of the play and it is left to Valentine to salvage what is left of dramatic structure in the very last lines with their promise of wedded love cemented by firm friendship: 'One feast, one house, one mutual happiness'. [5.4.171]

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, for all its failings, is a rich source of material more fully developed in later plays, particularly identity, individuation and the divided self. These themes, treated comically in *Two Gentlemen* - though Proteus is contained with some difficulty within the comic mode - are explored tragically in *Troilus and Cressida*. In the scene where Troilus looks on in growing anguish as his mistress woos Diomedes, he tries to reconcile her behaviour with the Cressida he last saw in Troy:

This, she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
 If beauty have a soul, this is not she.
 If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
 If sanctimony be the god's delight,
 If there be rule in unity itself,
 This is not she [...].

[*Troilus and Cressida* 5.2.140-146]

The distinction between 'his' Cressida and 'Diomed's' recalls Valentine's 'all that is mine in Silvia'. The assumption that Cressida must be the property of one or the other is a denial of her personal integrity and, ironically, lies at the root of her defection. It is just such an attitude that underlies her treatment by the Greek generals when she arrives in the camp and reveals her need for a protector if she is to avoid becoming, in Ulysses' contemptuous phrase, 'spoils of opportunity' (4.6.63). Her first words in the scene at Calchas' tent address Diomedes as her 'sweet guardian' (5.2.8) and her subsequent endearments sound more like attempt to placate and appease a man who can at least offer protection from further gross familiarities than expressions of love. Troilus cannot believe this is the Cressida who vowed her fidelity to him in Pandarus' orchard, but the audience recognises exactly the same wary consciousness of vulnerability which made her so hesitant in accepting his suit:

If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.

[...]

See, we fools!

Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us

When we are so unsecret to ourselves. [3.2.116-122]

Diomed may prove a 'tyrant' but he offers a kind of security; without his protection she knows she will be 'plagued' (5.2.107) by the rest of the Greek high command. Troilus accuses her of duplicity; ironically, she attempts to deal with her grief and remorse at betraying him by making a conscious division between her subjective and objective selves:

Troilus, farewell. One eye yet looks on thee,
 But with my heart the other eye doth see.
 Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find: The error of our eye
 directs our mind.
 What error leads must err. O then conclude:
 Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude. [5.2.109-114]

The confusion between 'eye', 'heart' and 'mind' here betrays the turmoil in her thoughts. She has one 'eye' for each lover; her perception is divided. Pragmatic considerations, however, ('mind') argue her need for Diomed and, if she must become his mistress to preserve what remains of her personal integrity, the only way to make her situation tolerable is to convince herself that he has her 'heart'. However, her admission of 'error' and 'turpitude' reveals a degree of tough realism which resists all attempts at self-deception.

The audience, who know Cressida a great deal better than Troilus does, find these sentiments entirely consistent with those expressed in an earlier exchange with Pandarus:

Pandarus: You are such another woman! One knows not at what ward you lie.
 Cressida: Upon my back to defend my belly, upon my wit to defend my wiles, upon my secrecy to defend mine honesty, my mask to defend my beauty, and you to defend all these -- and at all these wards I be at a thousand watches. [1.2 256-260]

There could scarcely be a clearer indication that self-protection is Cressida's ruling principle -- an entirely appropriate one for a girl in her situation. Temporarily overruled by her passion for Troilus, it quickly reasserts itself in the sexual minefield which is the Greek camp. Her behaviour towards Diomedes, then, seems natural, if not admirable. In her lover's eyes, however,

she seems to have ‘made division of [her] self’ which, ‘if there be rule in unity itself’ is nothing short of monstrous. In Chapter I we saw how Platonism was grounded in a belief in an ideal unity and consistency, summed up in Queen Elizabeth’s motto, *Semper Eadem*. ‘Diomed’s Cressida’ seems like the true Cressida’s false double, a dark projection of her faithlessness (Odile, as it were, to ‘his’ Cressida’s Odette). The psychological term for this phenomenon is the shadow, and some psychotic patients do believe that they actually have a double who lives out their antisocial fantasies. For example, Ronald True, who was sent to Broadmoor for murdering a prostitute, was convinced of the existence of a dangerous doppelganger and always carried a loaded revolver as protection against ‘him’:

There was a man, he said, going about the West End using the name of Ronald True [...]. This man, True suggested, was a dangerous criminal who went about armed, and consequently he, the real True, had obtained permission from Scotland Yard to carry a revolver lest one day he should meet his impersonator.¹⁵⁵

True’s projection of his own homicidal impulses into this imaginary other is almost exactly prefigured in Richard III’s soliloquy before the battle of Bosworth, where monologue slips into dialogue as Richard confronts his shadow-self. Having been haunted by the ghosts of all his victims, he is afflicted by this most terrible of phantoms:

What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by.
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.

¹⁵⁵ Donald Carswell, ‘Ronald True – 1922’, in *Famous Trials*, ed. by Harry Hodge & James, H. Hodge (London: Book Club Associates, 1984), pp. 278-325 (p.293).

Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
 Then fly! What, from myself?
[Richard III 5.5.136-139]

‘I am I’ is a desperate attempt to integrate the subjective Richard (the man oppressed by guilt and terror) and the objective Richard (the evil tyrant who has made his way to the throne over the corpses of all those who opposed or threatened him). Like Proteus, Richard has separated the two halves of his personality and given full rein to the active, competitive side without restraint from the introspective, affective side. Indeed, Richard has actively invoked his villainous other self. After his successful wooing of Lady Ann he enjoys a triumphant moment of grotesquely perverted narcissism:

Upon my life she finds, although I cannot.
 Myself to be a marv’lous proper man.
 I’ll be at charges for a looking glass
 [...]
 Since I am crept in favour with myself,
 I will maintain it with some little cost
 [...]
 Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
 That I may see my shadow as I pass.
[1.2.240-250]

As we have seen, the normal human personality has two aspects, one facing ‘inward to his own confidence in being uniquely himself’ and the other ‘outward to his society’. However, Richard’s sense of uniqueness is so extreme that he has no sense of relatedness to others:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
 And this word, ‘love’, which greybeards call divine,
 Be resident in men like one another.
 And not in me -- I am myself alone.

[*Richard Duke of York* 5.7.81-84]

Unable like Dromio to find his identity confirmed and validated in another like himself ('I see by thee I am a sweet-faced fellow') he projects his need for self-affirmation onto his shadow-double. Alienated and isolated, he compensates for his inability to love others by deceiving and manipulating them with a series of bravura performances:

I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could
[...]
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages
[3.2 188-189, 191-192]

This aspect of Richard's personality will be discussed more fully in Chapter V. Here it is relevant to note that the most egocentric of Shakespeare's characters is the most vulnerable to psychic fragmentation. His solipsism - 'I am myself alone' - is truly monstrous. As Montaigne says, if our faces were not similar we could not distinguish a man from a beast. By denying his resemblance to other men, Richard seems not more but less than human.

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* we saw how Proteus, deprived of his psychic 'twins' Julia and Valentine, declines into a 'shadow'. Richard, who rejects both love and brotherhood, is finally made to confront and engage in dialogue with his murderous shadow-self:

Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason. Why?
Lest I revenge. Myself upon myself?

Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
 That I myself have done unto myself?
 O no, alas, I rather hate myself
 For hateful deeds committed by myself.
 I am a villain. Yet I lie: I am not.
 Fool, of thyself, speak well. -- Fool, do not flatter.
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues [...].
 [Richard III 5.1.139]

The mental state reflected in this passage, with its short, abrupt sentences, broken lines and insistent repetition of 'myself' is one of psychological disintegration. The king's villainous persona is perceived as a separate being, an evil twin, yet as inescapable as his own shadow. The lines bear a striking resemblance not only to Rank's theory of the double but also to St. John Chrysostom's account of the operation of conscience in the mind of the sinner:

Such is the custom of sinners that they suspect all things, in so much as they doubt their own shadow [...]. For that he hath within his own conscience an accuser, that doth pursue him, the which accuser he always carrieth about with him. And as he cannot flee from himself, so can he not fly from this accuser, that resteth within his conscience.¹⁵⁶

Richard's courage has never failed him until this moment when he admits to Ratcliffe that 'shadows tonight | Have struck [...] terror to the soul of Richard' (5.5.170-171). His repeated assertions of self-love can be seen as horror at the prospect of the 'submergence into nothingness' which Spiess sees as the root cause of fear of death.¹⁵⁷ Death, for Spiess, is the ultimate loss of individuality. Richard, the supreme individualist ('I am myself alone')

¹⁵⁶ quoted in Peter Millward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), p.47.

¹⁵⁷ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*; (Chapel Hill : University of California Press, 1970), p.79.

confronts his imminent dissolution with 'despair' (5.5.154). The technical meaning of despair, in terms of Christian moral philosophy, is the conviction of damnation. By placing one's self beyond Divine forgiveness, it attempts to pre-empt the judgement of God and is thus an act of *hubris*. Richard, self-obsessed to the last, appoints himself judge, prosecutor and jury in his own case and finds himself 'guilty' with no appeal to Divine mercy. His self-condemnation is, paradoxically, his supreme act of self-assertion.

Richard believes that because he cannot escape from his sinful other he/they cannot be forgiven. His predicament is like that of a Siamese twin permanently linked to a loathsome partner who is nevertheless part of himself. Leslie Fiedler sees in joined twins 'the confusion of self and other, substance and shadow' which almost exactly parallels Richard's state of mind at this moment.¹⁵⁸

In our ancestors' awareness of Siamese Twins, the myth of the double merged with that of the multiple monster to create a myth of the monstrous self and an identically monstrous other joined together till death do them part.¹⁵⁹

Richard III's 'monstrous other' is self-created out of his own egotism. In *Richard II* Shakespeare considers another kind of double self by taking the political theory of the king's two bodies and making this metaphor, in O. Hood Phillips' words, 'not only the symbol but the very substance and essence

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Farmer, p.307.

¹⁵⁹ quoted in Farmer, p.308.

of the play'¹⁶⁰ which explores the tragic consequences of separating these bodies before the death of the king.

The technical term for such a separation was 'demise'. The nature of the king's demise and the theory on which it is based is defined by Justice Southcote, seconded by Justice Harper in terms quoted by Ernst H. Kantorowicz in his classic study of medieval political philosophy, *The King's Two Bodies*:

The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies; the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his Death is not called in our Law the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the word (Demise) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, nor now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural.¹⁶¹

The deposition scene in *Richard II* enacts this event. By solemnly divesting himself of the regalia of royalty, Richard lays aside his body politic. The play questions the validity of such a transference.

None of Shakespeare's kings is so conscious of his dual nature as Richard. In

¹⁶⁰ O. Hood Phillips, *Shakespeare and the Lawyers* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 53-54.

¹⁶¹ Ernest H Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1957), p.13.

the opening speech of the play his use of the royal plural ('our leisure': *Richard II* 1.1.5) stresses his absolute belief in his 'twin-born greatness'.¹⁶² In his next speech he adopts the singular form, 'tell me': 1.1.8) but as he asserts his royal prerogative as arbitrator between Bolingbroke and Mowbray he resumes the form appropriate to his rank and status:

Then call them to our presence
 Face to face
 And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
 The accuser and the accused freely speak. [1.1.15-17]

Throughout the play, Richard's usage shifts from singular to plural and back again; 'one face, one voice, one habit and two persons'. He is always conscious of the distinction between his mortal, passionate body,

I live with bread, like you; feel want,
 Taste grief, need friends [3.2.171-172]

and his immortal, ceremonial body,

We are amazed; and thus long have we stood
 To watch the fearful bending of thy knee [...] [3.3.71-72]

The exterior symbol of the king's body politic is the crown and the rest of the royal regalia with which he is invested at his coronation. To the Lancastrian

¹⁶² Kantorowicz, p.5.

kings, Henry IV and Henry V, the crown is synonymous with royal authority and royal responsibility: 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown' (*Henry IV Part Two* 3.1.31). Part of this unease stems from doubts about the legitimacy of succession. It is not only Richard's death in Pomfret which troubles his successor's conscience but the dubious legality of his demise in Westminster Hall. Richard's ceremonious dis-coronation --

I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand [...] [4.1.194-185]

reminds everyone present of the moment of his investiture, when the body politic, 'a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal'¹⁶³ was invested in him by a religious ritual in which he not only received the outward trappings of majesty but was anointed with holy oils as a sign of his sacred office and accepted the oath of loyalty from his subjects. Richard may assert,

With mine own tears I wash away my balm
[...]
With my own breath release all dutious oaths (4.1.197-200)
but
Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king.
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the lord. [3.2.50-53]

¹⁶³ Kantorowicz, p.13.

Oil, once applied, cannot be removed; words, once spoken, cannot be unsaid. Bolingbroke may 'seize' the crown (4.1.172) and with it the government of the realm but Richard remains an anointed king. Whether or not his deposition constitutes a genuine demise is an open question. Even the words in which 'unkinged Richard' (4.1.210) declares his allegiance to his successor are ambiguous:

God pardon all oaths that are made to me.
God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee. [4.1.24-205]

Richard uses the singular pronoun to refer to himself, implying that he no longer embodies the 'Policy and Government of the Kingdom', but to Bolingbroke he uses the familiar form 'thee', the proper form of address to inferiors or equals, not the usage appropriate from a subject to a king. Indeed, if Richard is not a king, what is he?

I have no name, no title,
No, not that name was given me at the font,
But 'tis usurped. Alack the heavy day
That I have worn so many winters out
And know not now what name to call myself. [4.1.244-249]

Richard's reference to his baptism is significant here. This is one of the sacraments - Holy Orders is another - which impart a 'character' to the soul, that is, a mark or seal which cannot be effaced. In this respect it resembles the consecration of a king, which though not strictly a sacrament, is sacramental in nature in that it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible change. As at his coronation the King formally assumes his dual nature (his

two bodies), so at baptism the candidate becomes a child of God as well as a child of Adam. Both ceremonies involve anointing. This is a very ancient sign of consecration; in the first book of *Kings* we read how ‘Zadok the priest took a horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon’ (I *Kings* 2.39). The King’s ceremonial body, therefore, assumed at his anointing, is not merely a body politic. To secular authority is added a dual capacity embodied in one person. Kantorowicz cites an anonymous twelfth-century political tractate which argues, in the context of royal anointing:

we thus have to recognise [in the king] a *twin person*, one descending from nature, the other from grace. Concerning one personality, he was, by nature, an individual man; concerning his other personality, he was, by grace, a Christus, that is, a God-man.¹⁶⁴

It is this theory which underlies the allusions to Judas (4.1.160), Pilate (4.1.229) and Golgotha (4.1.135) and causes Richard to interpret his ordeal in terms of Christ’s Passion: ‘you / Have here delivered me to my sour cross’ [4.1.230-231].

The reference to his baptism may have an added force in this context, since he was born on the feast of the Baptism of Christ - John the Baptist appears prominently among his patrons in the Wilton Diptych - and thus may be drawing a further parallel between his role as the Lord’s Anointed and that of Jesus who, as the Christ (or Anointed One) had his divine nature proclaimed

¹⁶⁴ Kantorowicz, p.46.

by the Baptist: 'And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and it abode upon him [...] And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God' (*John* 1.32, 34). Christening, to Richard, suggests naming and associated problems of identity. At his baptism he was anointed and received the name of Richard; at his coronation he was anointed and received the title of King. If the 'character' or seal of kingship can be eradicated, why not that of baptism? His request for a mirror, then, is an attempt to recognise and identify his 'unking'd' self:

An if my word be sterling yet in England,
 Let it command a mirror hither straight,
 That it may show me what a face I have,
 Since it is bankrupt of his majesty. [4.1.254-257]

'His' majesty seems to distinguish between the speaker and his face, between his passionate (suffering) body and the body politic, an impression which is confirmed when he looks into the glass:

And made no deeper wounds? No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath
 sorrow struck
 So many blows upon this face of mine

[...]

Was this the face
 That like the sun did make beholders wink?
 A brittle glory shineth in this face.
 As brittle as the glory is the face.
He shatters the glass
 For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers. [4.1.267-279]

In these lines we see the confrontation between Richard's 'body natural', subject to the depredations of age and sorrow, and the 'body politic' which exists outside time and is impervious to human experience, 'void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities'.¹⁶⁵

When he rode out to negotiate with Watt Tyler's rebels, the historical Richard II told them that he was willing to grant them everything possible except his own '*regalitée*'.¹⁶⁶ It is the 'glory' of this *regalitée* that he sees in the looking glass and which, in token of his demise, he shatters to pieces. However, the ensuing exchange with Bolingbroke calls into question the efficacy of this action:

Richard: Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport:
How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face.
Bolingbroke: The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed
The shadow of your face. [4.1.280-283]

Marlowe's Edward II asserts that kings 'when regiment is gone' are no more than 'perfect shadows in a sunshine day' (*Edward II* 5.1.26-27). But which is the shadow here and which the substance? Bolingbroke's unimaginative, literal-minded response to Richard's gesture raises the question: where does *regalitée* now reside: with Richard, self-proclaimed Man of Sorrows and glorified Christos, or with the quiet, pragmatic realist who now occupies the throne?

¹⁶⁵ Edmund Plowden quoted in Kantorowicz, p.7.

¹⁶⁶ Bryan Bevan, *King Richard II* (London: The Rubicon Press, 1990), p.25.

The breaking of the looking glass is, therefore, arguably more than ‘a rejection of wordly vanity’ as Jonathan Bate asserts.¹⁶⁷ If we accept Anthony B. Dawson’s view that ‘the real dilemma of the play is built on the conflict between the demands of the king’s two bodies’¹⁶⁸ this gesture can be seen as the climactic point in that conflict. John Barton’s 1973 production for the RSC gave great weight to this moment. Robert Smallwood’s account catches the way in which the ‘large round mirror’ was made to symbolise both the king’s sacramental and his mortal body:

His smashing of it as he contemplated his face in it removed all the glass, leaving only the circular frame which Bolingbroke lowered slowly over Richard’s head on the line “The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face” halo becoming halter as he did so.¹⁶⁹

This imaginative piece of stage business exploited the full richness and complexity of Shakespeare’s use of the looking glass and suggests that, rather than ‘wordly vanity’ it is the unworldly glory of his sacramental body which Richard sees in it.

Mirrors, like twins, do however inevitably evoke memories of the Narcissus myth and A.D. Nuttall argues persuasively the case for seeing Richard II as ‘the most elaborately Narcissistic of [Shakespeare’s] heroes’¹⁷⁰ For Nuttall,

¹⁶⁷ Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p.144.

¹⁶⁸ Anthony B. Dawson, *Watching Shakespeare: A Playgoer’s Guide* (Basingstoke and London : Macmillan, 1988), p.77.

¹⁶⁹ *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, ed.by Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.184.

¹⁷⁰ A.D. Nuttall, ‘Ovid’s Narcissus and Shakespeare’s Richard II :The Reflected Self’, in *Ovid Renewed*, pp, 137-150 (p.137).

‘the reflection in the glass is at the heart of Shakespeare’s play’,¹⁷¹ and he sees Richard as a study in the self-conscious, introspective temperament which contemplates the events of its own life as a spectacle, aware of irony, paradox, even tragedy with a sensibility which is both detached and engaged:

It is as if, in order to be conscious of the self, we must to some extent objectify the self, and a self which has been turned into an object is no longer truly a self. In the act of introspection the real self will be that which is doing the introspecting, and that which is being introspected will be some sort of image. If we try to re-express the thought in *image* terms we shall find that there is one image which immediately conveys the required tension: the mirror. The face in the glass is oneself and yet not oneself, a mere projected image.¹⁷²

Narcissus is usually associated with self-love. This was the usual interpretation of the myth in Shakespeare’s lifetime. In Whitney’s *Choice of Emblemes* his fate is interpreted as a warning against this ‘follie’ which leads to ‘reproche, and shame’.¹⁷³ Nuttall, however, though he sees both Ovid’s Narcissus and Shakespeare’s Richard as ‘studies of self-love’,¹⁷⁴ and though he concedes that ‘looking at one’s own face is not the same as introspection’,¹⁷⁵ insists that it ‘can serve as an emblem for introspection’.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps it is truer to say that Narcissus is an image of self-regard in both senses of the phrase, self admiration and self consciousness. Like the twins and other doubles in Shakespeare’s plays, he stands for awareness of the

¹⁷¹ Nuttall, p.141.

¹⁷² Nuttall, p.139.

¹⁷³ Whitney’s ‘*Choice of Emblemes*’: *A Facsimile Reprint* ed. by Henry Green (London, : Lovell Reeve & Co., 1866), p.149.

¹⁷⁴ Nuttall, p.149.

¹⁷⁵ Nuttall, p.149.

¹⁷⁶ Nuttall, p.149.

distinction between 'that which is doing the introspection and that which is introspected' -- between 'I' and 'myself' (or my self).

However, as Jonathan Miller points out, 'Narcissus fell for and indeed into his own reflection without recognising that he was looking at himself'.¹⁷⁷ As an icon of the search for the ideal other, the same yet separate partner, he is therefore another manifestation of the desire expressed in Aristophanes' allegory of love in *The Symposium*. Valentine's assertion that Silvia is his 'self', Troilus' disgusted rejection of 'Diomed's Cressida' dramatise this desire for a union which transcends self and yet, paradoxically, claims possession of the other. Only, perhaps, between 'identical' twins can such mutual affirmation be fully achieved, and the reunion of separated twins is Shakespeare's most powerful image of the perfect integration of what Coppélia Kahn has defined as the two sides of identity. For Shakespeare, according to Marion Bodwell Smith, 'the happy man is the he who in learning to know and accept his own dualities has learned to know and accept the world'.¹⁷⁸ Other attempts to come to terms with these dualities will form the subject of the next two chapters.

¹⁷⁷ Miller, p.156.

¹⁷⁸ Marlon Bodwell Smith, *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p.20.

IV

The telling of James Barry's story is a struggle with pronouns, just as Barry's life was a struggle with pronouns. How limited English seems in allowing us only a male 'he', a female 'she', or a dehumanising, debasing 'it' [---].

As Barry's biographer, I was overwhelmed by the frequency with which the same question was asked of me: Was Barry, in fact, a man or a woman? [----]. The desire behind this question was to make Barry's life knowable. Establishing Barry's sex would, the question supposed, confirm both the inner and outer truth of his life [---]. My both and neither, betwixt-and-between answers were received as if I was, somehow, obstructing the real truth of Barry's identity. In pursuit of Barry's life, I discovered that at the end of the twentieth century it was still necessary for a person – living or dead – to have a 'true' sex that lined up with the available categories of human sex around which culture is still organised [---]. It seemed that there was no place for uncertainty, and that uncertainty was not a truth.

Rachel Holmes: *Scanty Particulars*

Chapter IV

Cross-dressing Heroines: the Androgynous Self

In Act 2, Scene 2 of *Twelfth Night*, Viola ruefully contemplates the ramifying ambiguities of identity and relationship created by her male disguise:

I left no ring with her. What means this lady?
 Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her. [---]
 I am the man. If it be so - as 'tis -
 Poor lady, she were better love a dream!
 How easy is it for the proper false
 In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
 Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
 For such as we are made of, such we be.
 How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
 And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
 And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
 What will become of this? As I am man,
 My state is desperate for my master's love.
 As I am woman, now, alas the day,
 What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe.
 [*Twelfth Night* 2.2.17-39]

Viola is the only one of Shakespeare's transvestite heroines who actually describes herself as a monster, though, in their different ways, Julia, Rosalind, Portia and Innogen all explore similar areas of metamorphosis, dualism, and liminality. Viola alone, however, is doubly monstrous, as both androgyne and separated twin, as both a doubled and a divided self, and this Act 2 soliloquy resonates with the multiplying complexities and contradictions of her situation. 'As I am man ...as I am woman' defines the most obvious of these

contradictions, but the precise identity of the 'I' who speaks these lines is deeply problematic. At least four personalities are contained within this 'I', and the difficulty of distinguishing between them testifies to the intriguing elusiveness of this enchantingly enigmatic character. They may be classified as follows: 1) the heroine of *Twelfth Night*, known only to the audience and the sea-captain of 1.2 who, for convenience's sake we may refer to as Viola, although her name is not revealed until the final scene; 2) a composite figure, Viola-Sebastian, created by Viola in an attempt to preserve the self-affirming presence of her brother; 3) Orsino's page, Cesario, the identity assumed by Viola during her stay in Illyria, and 4) one half of 'Cesario', a figure, recognised as one individual by the citizens of Illyria but actually composed of both twins, who first refuses to fight with Sir Andrew and then beats both him and Sir Toby and woos Olivia on Orsino's behalf before accepting her proposal of marriage. This last personage has not actually made his appearance at this point in the play, but the immediately preceding scene between Sebastian and Antonio has prepared us for his arrival.

To varying degrees and in various ways, all these personae are sexually ambiguous. The most straightforward case is that of Viola -- a girl disguised as a man, her true nature concealed by the 'proper-false' of a male 'outside'. Viola-Sebastian is more problematic. As we saw in the previous chapter, this ambivalent figure represents Viola's effort to retain her sense of identity by keeping the image of her lost twin 'yet living in [her] glass'. (3.4.372). For the other characters in the play, Viola-Sebastian is embodied in Cesario (or 'Cesario') a figure of profoundly ambiguous sexuality who seems to exist in a

kind of liminal state, not only between male and female but also between maturity and immaturity. Orsino unwittingly responds to his page's feminine beauty but attributes it to (male) sexual immaturity:

[---] they shall yet bely thy happy years
 That say thou art a man. Diana's lip
 Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
 Is as the maidens's organ, shrill and sound,
 And all is semblative a woman's part. [1.4.30-34]

and even Malvolio finds himself baffled by the Count's strangely obdurate messenger:

Olivia:	Of what personage and years is he?
Malvolio:	Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy; as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis with him in standing water between boy and man. [1.5.150-154]

The degree to which Viola has internalised both aspects of her dual persona is revealed in her Act II soliloquy, where she refers objectively to 'women's waxen hearts' and yet, in the following line, identifies herself with women, 'such we be'. It is, of course, precisely this androgynous empathy which appeals to both Orsino and Olivia. However, as long as Viola-Sebastian is embodied in a single individual, the emotional tangle of unrequited love and 'thrifless sighs' cannot be resolved. It is the existence of 'Cesario' which makes the happy resolution possible.

Feste's song predicts this fortunate outcome:

O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low. [2.3.39-40]

Singing high and low alludes not only to Cesario's sexual ambiguity but also to the blend of maturity and immaturity which Malvolio find so disconcerting in Orsino's importunate messenger. The duke addresses 'him' as 'good youth' (1.4.15). 'dear lad' (1.4.29) and 'boy' (2.4.14); however, as Viola rightly suspects, for Olivia 'he' is 'the man' with whom she has fallen in love (2.2.19). These conflicting elements in Cesario's persona are polarized in 'Cesario'. I cannot agree with Bruce Smith that the role of Sebastian was written for a boy player:

If Viola and Sebastian are visually twins, then they likely were so aurally as well. Certainly Olivia hears no difference when she takes Sebastian for 'Cesario' in 4.1, 4.3 and 5.1. Sebastian's part almost certainly, therefore, belongs to the treble clef.¹⁷⁹

This is surely carrying the principle of theatrical realism to excessive lengths. The 'fact' that the twins cannot be distinguished from one another is a dramatic device, not merely the 'McGuffin' which drives the plot of *Twelfth Night* but a means of opening out an exploration of the meaning of identity; its success depends upon the equally important fact that, to the audience, the twins are not identical, that one is patently a mature young male and the other a girl in disguise.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, p.20.

More convincing than Smith's theory of a treble-voiced Sebastian is Stevie

Davies' analysis of the distinction between the twins:

Though the whole play is grounded on [Sebastian's] literal identity with Viola (same height, same face, same treble voice) his gruff, macho and pugilistic behaviour contradicts this identity, and he refers to Viola as if they had different ages (5.1.245). The idea of twinhood is in practice a floating function, as blurred as the sexual indeterminacy it signals.¹⁸⁰

Why else would Viola allude to her father's death in terms of her own birth-date -

[---] that day when Viola from her birth
Had numbered thirteen years [5.1.243-244]

- if Shakespeare were not carefully avoiding reminding the audience that she and her brother were 'both born in an hour'? (2.1.17) At the very moment when the emotional focus of the play is on the reunion of the twins, he is already preparing the ground for pairing off the lovers, and to achieve this he needs a mature Sebastian.

The arrival of this convenient suitor is not merely a solution to Olivia's romantic yearnings but, for Viola, a release from the burden of sustaining her brother's persona whilst retaining her own sense of self. The strain imposed by her disguise is revealed in her convoluted response to Orsino's question, '[...] died your sister of her love, my boy?':

¹⁸⁰ Stevie Davies, *'Twelfth Night'*, Penguin Critical Studies (Harmondsworth and London : Penguin Books, 1993), p.124.

I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too; and yet I know not. [2.4.119-121]

The elision of parent-child and sibling relationships betrays the confusion and distress caused by her struggle to encompass in the identity of Cesario a sister who never existed and a brother who may no longer be alive. Torn between attraction to Orsino and grief for Sebastian, her 'state is desperate' indeed (2.2.37), as her sense of self becomes ever more fragmented. Orsino does not ask the name of the 'sister' and we do not learn Cesario's true name until the last scene of the play. Is this imaginary sister the 'real' Viola? It is surely significant that though she imitates her twin's appearance and dress she does not take his name: to do so would be to acknowledge his death.

The turning-point in the play, from Viola's point of view, is the moment in Act 3 scene 4 when Antonio addresses her as Sebastian, confirming her hope that the twin whom she sees 'yet living in [her] glass' may indeed be alive (3.4.372). Antonio's words uncannily reflect her own experience since the storm which separated her from her brother:

This youth that I see here
I snatched one half out of the jaws of death,
Relieved him with such sanctity of love,
And to his image, which methought did promise
Most venerable worth, did I devotion [3.4.351-355]

As Antonio 'recognises' her as Sebastian, so Viola recognises in his words a mirror-image of her own love for her twin - 'one half' of herself - her own

devotion to his 'image', her own efforts by preserving that image in her own person, to keep him alive. For Viola this is a truly metamorphic moment. In this stranger's eyes, she has actually become her brother. Her predicament, however, is entirely her own and totally incommunicable. Her experience, as Antonio berates her for heartless ingratitude, is akin to that of Actaeon, set upon by his own hounds as he hears, but cannot reply to, the shouts of his companions. Viola cannot reveal her true identity without discarding her disguise. Actaeon is unrecognised by his friends: she is falsely recognised by her brother's friend. For both, the process of transformation brings a terrible sense of isolation, the feeling of being trapped in the wrong body. Brooks Otis sees Actaeon's predicament as a 'tragedy [in] that he combines an animal form with a human mind'.¹⁸¹ 'Cesario' here has the appearance of Sebastian but the consciousness of Viola. Viola's moment of metamorphosis initiates the comic resolution of the plot, the reappearance of Sebastian, but like Actaeon's her anomalous state is wretched.

Otis equates Actaeon's 'tragic inability to communicate [with] lost identity'.¹⁸² Even before her metamorphic encounter with Antonio, Viola's assumed identity renders her incapable of communicating her true feelings. Even with Orsino, most of all with Orsino, she must resort to equivocation and ambiguity:

My father had a daughter loved a man

¹⁸¹ Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.107.

¹⁸² Otis, p.342.

As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman
I should your lordship. [2.1.108-110]

If, in the scene with Antonio, we see Viola in a state of psychic fusion, as she is identified both *as* and *with* Sebastian, here she undergoes a kind of psychic fission, as one part of herself, her love for Orsino, assumes a separate identity in the form of an imaginary sister. Her careful negotiation of the language of relationship and the tentative tone produced by the use of the subjunctive mood betray the strain involved in speaking truly to deceive.

It is not surprising that the most perceptive comment on Cesario's anomalous identity occurs during a conversation about the unreliability of language, when Feste exclaims, 'To see this age! -- A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit, how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward' [3.1.11-13]

The punning exchange in which this observation occurs takes up the first fifty-eight lines of Act 3. It contributes nothing to the plot but, with its emphasis on the uncertain relationship between signifier and signified, between names and persons, words and things, it foregrounds one of the central concerns of the play, embodied (literally) in the role of Viola-Cesario. Both as twin and as androgyne s/he is a kind of living pun, a taxonomic and semantic enigma which Feste's probing wordplay almost seems to be on the point of solving. Stephen Orgel has discussed at length the implications of the Renaissance theory that 'the female genitals were simply the male genitals inverted, and

carried internally rather than externally',¹⁸³ and cites instances, recorded by the physician Ambroise Paré and the philosopher Montaigne, of female-to-male sex changes caused by the sudden inversion of the genitalia 'under the pressure of some great exertion or excitement'.¹⁸⁴ There is no danger, of course, that Viola will actually turn into a man but, as she is repeatedly accused of actions performed by her alter-ego, Cesario-Sebastian, her own identity is increasingly subsumed into that of the unequivocally male individual who has broken Sir Andrew's pate, attacked Sir Toby and become betrothed to the Countess.

It is perhaps in her relations with Olivia that the increasing fragility of Viola's sense of self is most fully revealed. At their first meeting, she responds to the question, 'Are you a comedian?' with the confident assertion, 'No, my profound heart; and yet -- by the very fangs of malice I swear -- I am not that I play.' (1.5.175-177). At this stage she is able to maintain a safe distance between Viola and Cesario, actor and role. However, after receiving the Countess's ring, she describes herself as a 'monster' (2.2.34) and when, at their next meeting, Olivia declares her love, she repulses her with the warning, 'I am not what I *am*' (3.1.139). Among Shakespeare's contemporaries, acting was known as 'personating'; by impersonating her brother, Viola has risked the negation of her own personality.

¹⁸³ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations : The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.20.

¹⁸⁴ Orgel, p.20.

Viola is unique among Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines in this respect. The others all succeed in maintaining the distinction between true self and assumed persona, mainly because they are each free to choose their own male identity. Indeed Julia, Rosalind and Portia take delight in planning the alteration in their appearance and behaviour called for by their new roles, and literally tailoring their masculine alter-egos to suit their own needs. Thus, while Julia draws the line at wearing a codpiece - 'Out, out Lucetta, that will be ill-favoured' (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 2.7.54) - or cutting her hair -

No girl, I'll knot it up in silken strings
 With twenty odd-conceited true-love knots
 [2.7.45-46]

- thus preserving her femininity under the guise of a 'fantastic youth' (2.7.47), Portia, appropriately for someone embarking on a mission of rescue, plans to adopt a more assertively masculine persona, boasting to Nerissa:

I'll hold thee any wager,
 When we are both accouter'd like young men
 I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
 And wear my dagger with the braver grace
 And speak between the change of man and boy
 With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
 Into a manly stride, and speak of frays
 Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies
 How honourable ladies sought my love,
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died.
 [*The Merchant of Venice* 3.4.62-71]

The audience, of course, never see Portia in this guise, which is merely a device to facilitate her visit to Bellario. Moreover, as I hope to demonstrate later in this chapter, her disguise as the learned Doctor Balthazar is functional rather than transformative. Innogen, too, manages to retain her true identity through all the vicissitudes of *Cymbeline*'s convoluted plot. True, her disguise is provided for her by Pisanio, but her self-chosen pseudonym, Fidele, is a strong affirmation of her essential nature and a repudiation of both Iachimo's assault on her chastity and Posthumus' denial of her constancy. None of these heroines is in any danger of being turned wrong side out by the exigences of their assumed maleness.

It is Rosalind, however, who provides the most striking contrast to Viola in this respect. Whereas, as we have seen, Viola-Cesario is a metamorphic 'monster', caught, like Actaeon, between two natures, Rosalind is a Protean being, assuming and discarding gender-roles at will. The readiness with which she adopts her male persona shows her understanding of the process which Stephen Greenblatt has termed 'self-fashioning':¹⁸⁵

Were it not better
Because that I am more than common tall,
That I did suit me all points like a man,
A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart,
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have,
That do outface it with their semblances.
[*As You Like It* 1.3.113-121]

¹⁸⁵ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, passim.

This goes beyond Portia's mocking exposure of masculine pretensions: it appears to claim that masculinity is in itself a form of pretence. By equating 'women's fear' with 'mannish' cowardice and deconstructing martial gallantry into its component elements -- boar-spear and curtle-axe -- these lines imply that all gender is performative, rather than essential, what Greenblatt describes as 'a characteristic mode of address to the world',¹⁸⁶ rather than an unalterable state of nature, and that 'the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity'.¹⁸⁷

Rosalind's disguise is genuinely transformative. It is Celia who takes the initiative in planning their escape from the court, whilst her more cautious cousin protests:

Alas, what danger will it be to us,
Maids as we are, to travel forth so far. [1.3.107-108]

Once established in her male role, however, she becomes the dominant partner:

I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and cry like a woman. But I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat; therefore, courage, good Aliena! [2.4.4-8]

However, this is the transformation of performance, not metamorphosis.

¹⁸⁶ Greenblatt, p.1.

¹⁸⁷ Greenblatt. p.1.

Rosalind acknowledges her 'female' weakness whilst fulfilling the demands of her masculine role. Moreover, unlike Viola, she has a confidante who allows her to keep in touch with her true nature whilst preserving her disguise. Ganymede is a means of embracing culturally-determined 'masculine' qualities, not only courage but also assertiveness and control. By imposing this shape upon herself, in Greenblatt's terms, Rosalind takes control not only of her own identity but also of the lives of Orlando, Silvius and Phoebe; her injunction to them, as she prepares to shed her disguise, 'So fare you well, I have left you commands' (5.2.115) is uttered with truly magisterial authority. The fact that it is Ganymede (rather than say, Sebastian or Balthazar) who utters these words is surely significant. By choosing the name of an Olympian, albeit a minor one, Rosalind has marked out for herself a super-human freedom from conventional notions of power, status and even gender.

Stephen Orgel sees the mythical connotations of the name Ganymede as foregrounding the sexual dynamics of *As You Like It*:

The idea of the boy displacing the woman appears in its most potentially threatening form, the catamite for whom Jove himself abandons his marriage bed. Why is this inescapable allusion a part of Orlando's and Rosalind's wooing?¹⁸⁸

Orgel answers his own question with the assertion that 'neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality existed as categories for the Renaissance mind',¹⁸⁹ rather

¹⁸⁸ Orgel, p.57.

¹⁸⁹ Orgel, p.59.

that ‘eroticized boys appear to be a middle term between men and women [...] [which] destabilize the categories and question what it means to be a man or a woman’.¹⁹⁰ As we have seen, Rosalind does indeed question the stability of male-female categories in her deconstruction of masculinity. As Ganymede, however, rather than embodying a ‘middle term’ between male and female, she seems to explore the possibility of freely adopting masculine and feminine qualities at will, in the spirit of Pico’s *Oratio* in which mankind’s freedom to choose his own nature is celebrated. Revelling in her Protean capacity for self-fashioning, she creates not one but two fictional personae, Ganymede and ‘Rosalind’, the uninhibited version of her feminine nature whom Orlando is invited to woo. Between them, these two compose a kind of hermaphrodite self through whom Rosalind explores and critiques the nature of love.

The liminal figure of the hermaphrodite, Stevie Davies reminds us, is ‘etymologically compounded of Hermes plus Aphrodite [and] can be seen either as a freak or a miracle’.¹⁹¹ Whereas Viola sees her disguised self as a ‘monster’, Ganymede incorporates the qualities of Hermaphroditus’ Olympian parents, the goddess who as ‘protectress of marriage and fertility ... loved engaged couples ... prepared marriages and stood watch at bridal chambers’,¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Orgel, p.63.

¹⁹¹ Davies, p.78.

¹⁹² Aghion etc., p.295.

and the divine patron of oratory 'known for his skill, inventiveness and wiles'.¹⁹³ Through her wit and eloquence, Rosalind promotes the course of true love in Arden: as Ganymede she berates Phoebe for her vanity and disdain and Silvius for his foolish doting, and as 'Rosalind' she challenges Orlando's conventional views of courtship and marriage with a Protean display of metamorphic shapeshifting:

I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than an monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry. I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.

[4.1.141-148]

To this 'Rosalind's' husband it might truly be said her 'manifold forms [will] baffle thee and figures of wild beasts'.¹⁹⁴

The fictive (but by no means unreal) 'Rosalind' is an epitome of all womankind – wife and mistress, beguiling coquette, shrew, scold, chatterbox and bluestocking -- and as such provides a radical alternative to Jaques' deterministic view of the seven ages of man, progressing uniformly and ineluctably from mewling infancy to second childhood. For 'Rosalind', as for Jaques, 'all the world's a stage' (2.7.139) but her version of the human theatre is closer to the neo-Platonic theory that 'all the various phases of ... experience

¹⁹³ Aghion etc., p.189.

¹⁹⁴ *Georgics* IV, 487-488.

... reflect the ultimate One of which they unfold particular aspects,¹⁹⁵ presenting, not a series of discrete and disparate roles -- lover, soldier, justice - - but a single dazzling performance exploring different aspects of the same personality. The role of 'Rosalind' is a kind of composite Everywoman through whom her creator can explore her own potentialities, discovering 'not only what [Orlando] is like, but what she is like'.¹⁹⁶ This process of self-discovery through playing, which involves both play-acting and playfulness, is shared by Orlando. Juliet Stevenson, who played Rosalind at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1985, perceptively notes:

Orlando plays the conventional woman's part in the play ... He isn't the pivot or motor of the play. He's there entirely in relation to Rosalind; his role as her lover is his identity. He spends most of his time asking questions - which she answers - and what happens to him is classically what happens to women in Shakespeare. His love is tested.¹⁹⁷

This is all the more surprising since Orlando is by far the most 'swashing and martial' of Shakespeare's romantic comedy heroes, laying violent hands on his brother in the very first scene, then going on to beat Charles the wrestler, threaten the exiled Duke and his companions at sword-point and (offstage) fight with a hungry lioness, though his tenderness towards Adam reveals a chivalrous concern for the weak and vulnerable.

¹⁹⁵ Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (London: Faber, 1958), p.158.

¹⁹⁶ Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London and New York : Methuen, 1980), p.191.

¹⁹⁷ Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p.105.

Rosalind's Protean adaptability extends throughout the play's pastoral world. Other characters undergo surprising transformations: Jaques, having briefly considered the attractions of a suit of motley, finally settles for a hermit's gown and beads; Oliver is converted from wicked brother to romantic lover; the usurping Duke becomes a convertite, and Touchstone, to his own amazement, dwindles into a husband. Like Arcadia, Arden is 'a place of Becoming, rather than Being',¹⁹⁸ a space apart from the rigid hierarchies of the court, where exiled noblemen, shepherds, hedge-priests, runaway princesses, goat-girls, fools and bumpkins can meet on terms of absolute freedom, if not equality. It is also, patently, a fictional world, a 'country of the imagination'¹⁹⁹ in which 'the person of Ganymede is an uncertain entity, insisting that all things are provisional, including the fiction in which he himself exists'.²⁰⁰ A consequence of the mutable, provisional nature of Arden is the necessity of a return to the stable, structured society of the court. The Duke is restored to his 'former honour' (5.4.184), Oliver and Orlando are promised 'to one his lands withheld, and to the other / A land itself at large, a potent dukedom' (5.4.166, 167) and Rosalind, having laid her male persona aside, resumes her 'proper' female status in society with a gesture of submission, first to her father and then to her future husband:

To you I give myself, for I am yours.
To you I give myself, for I am yours (5.4.114-115),

¹⁹⁸ Peter Marinelli, *Pastoral* (London: Methuen, 1971), p.37.

¹⁹⁹ Marinelli, p.3.

²⁰⁰ Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.180.

after which the most talkative woman in the entire Shakespearean canon falls silent. Brian Gibbons claims that the Rosalind we see at the end of *As You Like It* is no longer the Rosalind of the beginning of the play ‘but now a Rosalind in whom the shadow of the absent Ganymede remains’,²⁰¹ but there seems to me to be no evidence of this. Much may depend, as Ruth Nevo asserts, on whether, when she makes her entrance with Hymen, she has changed into women’s clothes. In spite of Maura Slattery Kahn’s persuasive argument that there is not enough time for an elaborate costume-change,²⁰² the dynamics of the scene, with its emphasis on marriage and ‘returnèd fortune’, (5.4.172) in other words, restoration of the *status quo ante*, seem to me to demand the abandonment of the heroine’s disguise and the demise of Ganymede.

If return to the city and the court is the natural conclusion of pastoral, the closure of romance is achieved through reunion, recognition and reconciliation. It follows, then, that questions of identity are of particular significance in *Cymbeline*. Innogen is not the only character in disguise or living under an assumed name, and the final scene consists almost entirely of a climactic series of revelations with attendant discoveries of long-lost relatives, all of whom are totally unrecognisable to their nearest kin. Before this fortunate resolution is attained, however, the disparity between identification and identity is gruesomely illustrated in a scene in which the heroine wakes

²⁰¹ Gibbons, p.181.

²⁰² ‘Much Virtue in If’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977) quoted by Nevo, p.196.

from a drugged trance to find Cloten's headless corpse beside her and 'recognises' it as that of her husband:

I know the shape of 's leg; this is his hand,
His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face --
Murder in heaven! How? 'Tis gone.

[*Cymbeline* 4.2.311-314]

This bizarre episode, notoriously difficult to bring off in performance, nevertheless foregrounds a central concern of the play. The particularity of Innogen's identification of Posthumus in the body of Cloten serves to emphasise the grossness of her error; what she has, in fact recognised, is a suit of clothes. Yet, as is clear from the rest of the play, clothes alone cannot disguise a living being: manners, speech, demeanour are far more revelatory. A corpse, particularly a headless corpse, has no personality, but, as Belarius observes, the royal birth of his two charges betrays itself in their noble bearing in spite of the humble circumstances of their life:

... though trained up thus meanly
I'th' cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them
In simple and low things to prince it much
Beyond the trick of others. [3.3.82-85]

Like their sister, Guiderius and Arviragus exemplify the Platonic ideal of virtue, 'singleness, fidelity, the identity of inner state and external appearance'²⁰³ summed up by Queen Elizabeth's motto, *semper eadem*, an ideal expressed by Innogen's pseudonym, Fidele.

²⁰³ Greenblatt, p.160.

Vice, in *Cymbeline*, is associated with falsehood and pretence; the queen is a hypocrite, Iachimo a smooth-tongued deceiver; Cloten, too stupid for such deviousness, plans to rape Innogen wearing Posthumus' clothes. The virtuous characters, however, though physically disguised, retain an integrity of character which cannot be obscured or concealed. Thus Innogen remains, throughout all her trials, the most unambiguously female of all Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines. Pisanio coaches her in the appropriate behaviour to sustain her male persona:

a waggish courage,
Ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy and
As quarrelous as the weasel. [3.4.158-160]

but, as Michael Shapiro points out, she seems more 'shy and vulnerable' as a boy than she appears as a woman when 'she stands up courageously to her father, stepmother and Cloten; she bids a brief but passionate farewell to Posthumus; and she boldly counters Iachimo's initial gambits even if she fails to anticipate his winning moves'.²⁰⁴ This shyness and vulnerability may be attributed to her change in status, from a princess to a peasant. Essentially, I would argue, she remains the same. Her conciliatory words to Guiderius and Arviragus, when she is discovered in their cave, are far from 'saucy' and 'quarrelous', but, though gentle, they are dignified and not without spirit:

Good masters, harm me not.

²⁰⁴ Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Elizabethan Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 176-177.

Before I entered here I called, and thought
 To have begged or bought what I have took. Good truth,
 I have stoll'n naught, nor would not, though I had found
 Gold strewed i'th' floor. Here's money for my meat.
 I would have left it on the board as soon
 As I had made my meal, and parted
 With prayers for the provider. [3.5.44-51]

Here is neither panic nor pleading. The balanced sentence-structure, pointed by alliteration -- 'begged/bought', 'made/meal', 'prayers/provider' -- bespeaks a well-bred poise in a situation which is at best embarrassing and at worst hazardous. The tone is recognisably the same as that adopted in her first encounter with Iachimo:

You do seem to know
 Something of me, or what concerns me. Pray you,
 Since doubting things go ill often hurts more
 Than to be sure they do - for certainties
 Either are past remedies, or, timely knowing,
 The remedy then born - discover to me
 What both you spur and stop. [1.6.94-99]

In both cases, though disconcerted, Innogen retains her composure and her command of syntax.

Whereas Cesario is Viola plus Sebastian, and Ganymede is a bolder, more liberated version of Rosalind, Fidele is simply Innogen in male attire. At first sight, Belarius compares her to a 'fairy, [...] an angel - or, if not, | An earthly paragon' (3.5.41-43) - hermaphrodite as miracle rather than monster - but she quickly assumes a traditional female role in her new-found family, acting as

'housewife' (4.2.44) and preparing 'broths' while the men go hunting (4.2.52).

Lucius, too, responds to his page's womanly virtues:

'so kind, so dutious, diligent,
So tender over his occasions, true.
So feat, so nurse-like. [5.6.86-88]

Nurse, cook, housekeeper, these terms tend to domesticate Fidele, yet, owing to the exigencies of the romance plot, s/he suffers more extreme tribulations and dangers than Shakespeare's other transvestite heroines, caught up, like practically every other character in *Cymbeline*, in 'a web of events beyond their comprehension'.²⁰⁵ A male identity is clearly no safeguard against the vicissitudes of fortune. Indeed, as Viola, Julia and Rosalind discover, it can bring unforeseen and unwelcome complications; the two first are compelled to woo rivals on behalf of the men they love, and even Rosalind is momentarily disconcerted by the news of her lover's presence in Arden - 'Alas the day, what shall I do with my doublet and hose!' (*As You Like It* 3.2.214-215) -- though, characteristically, she soon finds a way to turn the situation to her advantage.

The three heroines of *The Merchant of Venice*, however, suffer no such inconvenience: they assume male dress for a specific purpose and seamlessly

²⁰⁵ Shapiro, p.178.

resume their own identities when they have achieved their ends. Indeed, I would argue that Jessica's male costume is not a real disguise at all, but a form of fancy-dress. She has none of the usual motives for pretending to be a man; she is neither a solitary traveller like Julia nor a castaway like Viola. When she leaves her father's house in a 'page's suit' (*The Merchant of Venice* 2.4.32) it is to join a group of masquers who are also 'disguise[d]' (2.4.2) not for concealment but for display. Bound for Gratiano's feast, they 'purpose merriment' (2.2.195) and Jessica's costume is part of the fun. True, she protests against calling attention to her transformation by acting as a torchbearer:

I am much ashamed of my exchange;
 But love is blind, and lovers cannot see
 The pretty follies they themselves commit;
 For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
 To see me thus transformed to a boy.
 What, must I hold a candle to my shames?
 They in themselves, good sooth, are too too light.
 Why, 'tis an office of discovery, love,
 And I should be obscured. [2.6.34-44]

However, these lines betray a degree of sexual self-consciousness which is quite alien to the chaste Innogen or the sensitive Viola. Jessica's coy reference to the 'pretty follies' of lovers suggests that she is well aware that her page's costume is decidedly becoming, an impression confirmed by Lorenzo's admiring reference to her outfit as 'the lovely garnish of a boy' (2.6.45). Moreover, her declared intention of 'gild[ing]' herself with ducats (2.6.49) strikes a somewhat strident note in the context of a romantic elopement. As Alexander Leggatt comments, 'the involvement of love with money [...] is

essential to this love affair'.²⁰⁶ The slightly distasteful impression created by this episode is strengthened when it is placed in the context of Venetian sexual mores:

....Venice, in the sixteenth century, was a place in which transvestite costume was a common choice of courtesans. Public prostitutes, writes Cesare Vecellio, while they dress variously depending on their economic status, almost always wear a somewhat masculine outfit ... Many of them wear men's breeches, ... and one instantly recognises them for what they are because of these trousers and certain little round pieces of silver they use as ornaments.²⁰⁷

'Garnished' in male attire and 'gilded' with ducats: this does not sound much like a boy: it sounds more like a strumpet. Unlike Julia and Viola, who also act as pages to their future husbands, Jessica is neither an androgyne nor a metamorph; she is simply a girl in male dress.

Genuine female cross-dressing in *The Merchant of Venice* is more a matter of status than of gender. Both the Antonio-Shylock plot and the caskets plot turn on unbreakable legal commitments, the terms of the 'merry bond' (2.1.172) and the provisions of Portia's father's will, and the play as a whole explores the nature of contractual relationships and the contractual nature of relationships. In her role as arbitrator between the merchant and the Jew, Portia is not so much androgynous as transgressive, an Amazon rather than a

²⁰⁶ Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1974), p.5.

²⁰⁷ 'Much Virtue in If' in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28; (1977), quoted by Nevo: p196

hermaphrodite. In the Venetian court, the real sex of Doctor Balthazar is immaterial; what matters is the law, and whether Portia's interpretation of the law is her own or Bellario's is irrelevant. Balthazar's precise role in the trial scene has been hotly contested by lawyers. Hood Phillips sets out the terms of the argument:

E.D. Armour K.C., law lecturer, author on property law and editor of the *Canadian Bar Review* inclined to the view that she was an advocate, though he admitted that there was some ground for the opinion that she was acting as judge. Chief Justice Campbell called Portia the Podest or judge called in to act under the authority of the Doge. [Sir Frederick] Pollock said that Portia acts as a judicial assessor not as advocate. She speaks throughout on behalf of the court [....].²⁰⁸

On balance, then, legal opinion seems to favour the view that Portia is a judge. Certainly, when Antonio asks 'the court | To give a judgement' (4.1.240-241) it is Portia who replies, and throughout the proceedings Shylock refers to Balthazar as 'judge':

A Daniel come to judgement, yea, a Daniel!
O wise young judge, how I do honour thee. [4.1.220-221]

The allusion is presumably to the story of Susannah and the elders in the Apocrypha, but, as the audience knows, a closer parallel is provided by the Book of Judges and the character of Deborah, the only woman judge in Israel. The allusion would have been obvious to contemporary audiences because, as Amanda Shepherd points out, 'Elizabeth was widely recognised as England's

²⁰⁸ Phillips, p.125.

Deborah'.²⁰⁹ As woman and law-giver, Deborah is an anomaly in the world of the Old Testament as Elizabeth I was in sixteenth-century England. Robert Alter enumerates the linguistic ploys resorted to by the writer of *Judges* to emphasise the disjunction between the prophetess' sex and her status, noting that the 'purposeful awkwardness of the Hebrew is obscured in most English translations':

"And Deborah, a prophet-woman ('ishah nevi'ah), Lapidoth's woman, she was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah [...]" What is odd about these initial expository clauses in the Deborah story is the obtrusion of feminine gender and the term *woman*. Since all Hebrew nouns are either masculine or feminine, the moment you hear nevi'ah and not nevi' you realise that you are dealing with a prophetess, not a prophet. The superfluous woman in apposition with prophetess is immediately picked up in "Lapidoth's woman"[...]. This foregrounding of the feminine is then reinforced by the introduction of an easily disposable pronoun: "Deborah [...] *she* was judging Israel". The use of the participial form at the beginning of the next verse [...] is the occasion for immediately repeating the feminine pronoun: "And *she* would sit" lwehi' yoshevet -- an imperfect verb, wateshev, would have required no pronoun.²¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, Deborah figured prominently in the sixteenth-century controversy about the legitimacy of female rule. John Knox had to admit that God had chosen Deborah as his instrument, but he claimed that He had done so 'for His own divine purpose, and that individual biblical examples could not be taken randomly from the Bible and said to constitute a law'.²¹¹ Richard

²⁰⁹ Amanda Shepherd, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: The Knox Debate* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), p.164.

²¹⁰ Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (London: S.P.C.K., 1992), p.41.

²¹¹ Shepherd, p.161.

Bertie, however, argued that ‘a female governor was “no monster in the commonwealth or nature for He is not a God of monstrous disorder”’.²¹² Bertie’s wife, the Countess of Suffolk, and Lawrence Humphrey, a Marian exile, both compared Elizabeth to Deborah, and Humphrey, somewhat grudgingly, admitted that ‘it is not always unnatural and monstrous, if God calls and wishes a woman to hold the power’.²¹³

The parallels between the story of Deborah and Portia’s intervention in the case of Shylock v. Antonio are quite suggestive. Deborah ordered her general Barak to do battle with Sisera the Canaanite, but he refused to take to the field unless she accompanied him. Deborah complied with this request and it was she who gave the decisive order to advance. (*Judges* 4. 6-15) Portia sent Bassanio to buy off Shylock and save Antonio but he could not accomplish this without her crucial intervention in court. In both cases a woman, acting in a male role, saved the day when a man had proved unwilling or inadequate.

Deborah was a controversial figure in Jewish tradition. Miki Rover points out that Talmudic scholars such as Rabbi Hillel and Rav Nachman accused her of arrogance.²¹⁴ As the true conqueror of Sisera, she can be seen as akin to the Amazons, similarly ambiguous figures who can be celebrated as super-

²¹² Shepherd, p.163.

²¹³ J Kemp, ‘Laurence Humphrey, Elizabethan Puritan : His Life and Political Theories’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of West Virginia, 1978) pp. 212-213, quoted in Shepherd, p.65.

²¹⁴ Miki Raver, *Listen to Her Voice: Women of the Hebrew Bible* (San Francisco : Chronicle Books, 1998), p.99.

feminine heroes or sub-feminine monsters, a paradox neatly illustrated in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*:

And for as mutch as these Amazons defended themselves so valiently in the warres with bowe, and arrowes, and perceyved that their breastes did very mutch impech the use of that weapon, and other exercises of armes, they seared up the right breastes of their yonge daughters.²¹⁵

Are these warlike, transgressive females to be admired as brave women or condemned as cruel mothers? Like the figure of Deborah, Amazons were incorporated into the iconography surrounding Elizabeth I. James Aske in *Elizabetha Triumphans*, a celebration of the defeat of the Armada, describes Elizabeth addressing the troops at Tilbury as 'an Amazonian Queene, buskind and plumed, having a golden Truncheon, Gauntlet and Gorget'.²¹⁶ Whether or not this is an accurate account - and Mary Villeponteaux points out that there is 'insufficient evidence to be sure that event ever actually occurred'²¹⁷ - the image of Elizabeth as Amazon is a potent icon of power transcending, or transgressing, bounds of gender. Similarly Portia, attired in the legal equivalent of gauntlet and gorget, and armed with the lawyer's weapons of eloquence, jurisprudence and quick wits, is a plausible avator for Penthesilea

²¹⁵ William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure*, quoted in Mary Villeponteaux, 'Not as Women Wanted Be : Spenser's Amazon Queen' in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* ed. by Julia M. Walker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 209-225 (p.210).

²¹⁶ James Aske, *Elizabetha Triumphans*, (Amsterdam and New York: Da Capa Press, 1969), p.28.

²¹⁷ Villeponteaux, p.212.

or Hippolyta, and, with this comparison in mind, an interesting interpretation of the episode of Bassanio's ring suggests itself. One of the labours of Hercules was to obtain the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. According to G. S. Kirk, this might have been, not an article of clothing but 'a piece of armour (that is, a bronze waist-band)'.²¹⁸ So the ring which 'Balthazar' – actually the Amazonian Portia – obtains from Bassanio can be seen as the comic equivalent of this 'girdle' and the whole episode as a playful inversion of the Alcides myth and an ironic comment on the less-than-heroic qualities of Portia's bridegroom.

This reading can be supported by comparison with an earlier moment in the play when, as Bassanio prepares to make his choice between the caskets, Portia spins an elaborate mythological conceit involving herself as Hesione and her suitor as Hercules:

Now he goes,
With no less presence but with much more love
Than young Alcides when he did redeem
The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
To the sea-monster. I stand for sacrifice.
The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,

With bleared visages come forth to view
The issue of the exploit. Go, Hercules,
Live thou, I live. With much much more dismay
I view the fight than thou that mak'st the fray.

[3.2. 53-62]

Hesione, it will be remembered, was sacrificed because her father had failed

²¹⁸ Kirk, p.187.

to honour a bargain with Poseidon and Apollo. “Bound by the will of a dead father”, [1.2. 24] Portia hopes that Bassanio will set her free as Hercules freed the Trojan Princess. To the audience, however, the comparison seems ironic and perhaps even a little absurd: ‘Go, Hercules’ often gets a laugh in the theatre. Having observed Bassanio wheedling the capital to finance his marital enterprise out of Antonio, they may well have concluded that this charming playboy is no monster-slayer. Moreover, they know that the Lady of Belmont’s impecunious suitor, seeking a role-model among the heroes of antiquity, has cast himself not as Alcides but as Jason. Certainly, in the Venetian court the Hercules – Hesione story is neatly inverted, as Antonio ‘stand[s] for sacrifice’ for failing to fulfil his bargain with Shylock, and Portia performs the role of heroic rescuer.

The dramatic effect of Act V of *The Merchant of Venice* depends, of course, on the fact that the audience knows -- and Bassanio and Gratiano do not -- that the learned doctor and the ‘little scrubbed boy’, his clerk [5.1. 162] to whom they give their rings were actually their wives. But Shakespeare’s original audience would also have ‘known’ that both the mistress of Belmont and her maid were, in fact, boy players. In his extensive study of transvestite disguise in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, Michael Shapiro reviews various theories of the theatrical effect of cross-gender casting and concludes that ‘although everything actors do on stage is artificial, audiences are induced to accept as “natural” [...] behaviour that accords with their notions of the performer’s

authentic personality'.²¹⁹ However, Shakespeare's theatre was highly conventional and his audience was accustomed to such 'inauthentic' devices as asides, soliloquies, impenetrable disguises and even, as in the cases of Oberon and Prospero, invisibility, so I would argue that the degree to which the true sex of the player was a matter of concern to them would depend upon the dramatic context. Thus, the audience's perception of the character's 'true' self arises from the reality the dramatic self has created for them. So, since Portia's persona as Doctor Balthazar has an authority and gravitas more visually associated with male gender, the audience's pleasure is enhanced by their awareness that the lawyer's robes conceal the identity of the Lady of Belmont. *Cymbeline* celebrates the translucent purity of virtue, the 'identity of inner state and external appearance',²²⁰ so Innogen, the wronged princess, must remain *semper eadem* despite her male disguise. The comedy in *Twelfth Night* depends on the difference, apparent to the audience though not to the rest of the characters in the drama, between the virile Sebastian and his sister. The case of Rosalind is rather different. As I have suggested, *As You Like It* radically destabilizes conventional notions of gender, 'presenting the feminine in the masculine, the masculine in the feminine'.²²¹ In a play which celebrates [wo]mankind's capacity for change and refashioning, the question of normalization is almost irrelevant, as Rosalind, in her twin personae as Ganymede and 'Rosalind', flits between male and female roles with an ease

²¹⁹ Shapiro, p.73.

²²⁰ Greenblatt, p.160.

²²¹ Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London and New York : Routledge, 1994), p.81.

which is, as Ruth Nevo says, 'itself an abolition of disjunction'.²²² Michael Shapiro points out how 'the text provides rich opportunities for the performer to shift abruptly from one layer of gender identity to another'²²³ and speculates as to how this might have been realized on the Elizabethan stage:

In the minds of the audience and the performer, all three of these layers are understood as forming the complex amalgam of the female character, but an attempt to convey them simultaneously would produce confusion. Instead, I suggest that the boy actor did what most actors do when called upon to play multiple layers of identity: he committed himself fully to one layer of identity at a time as suggested by the script or determined in rehearsal, perhaps occasionally suggesting connections and oppositions between layers, or trusting the audience to do so. In moving from layer to layer, the performer could probably also count on spectators to maintain awareness of the play-boy and to admire his virtuosity.²²⁴

Though this is a rather pedestrian analysis of the process by means of which Rosalind 'floats freely between male and female identities',²²⁵ I feel that Shapiro is right to suggest that there is a metatheatrical element in 'her' performance of gender.

Certainly Julia, the long-suffering heroine of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, has an unquestioningly metatheatrical moment, in which the disjunction between role and performer comes close to the surface, intruding upon even the most willing suspension of disbelief. Forced to plead her faithless lover's

²²² Nevo, p.192.

²²³ Shapiro, p.122.

²²⁴ Shapiro: p123

²²⁵ Dennis Kay, *Shakespeare, His Life, Work and Era* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1992), p.218.

suit to the lady Silvia, she describes herself (Sebastian) wearing her own (Julia's) gown in a play whose plot recalls Proteus' betrayal of her love:

at Pentecost
 When all our pageants of delight were played,
 Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
 And I was trimmed in Madam Julia's gown,
 Which served me as fit, by all men's judgements,
 As if the garment had been made for me;
 Therefore I know she is about my height.
 And at that time I made her weep agoon,
 For I did play a lamentable part.
 Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
 For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight;
 Which I so lively acted with my tears
 That my poor mistress, movèd there withal,
 Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead
 If I in thought felt not her very sorrow.
 [*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 4.4.155-169]

I suggested in the previous chapter that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is much concerned with the implications of the word 'myself'. The speaker of these lines appears in a bewildering variety of 'selves' -- Julia playing Sebastian, Sebastian playing Ariadne, and Julia watching Sebastian playing Ariadne -- which merge and separate and re-merge in differing configurations. Just as her male persona and her real self are conflated in the image of Sebastian dressed in Julia's gown, so the emotions of actor, role and audience are conflated, as Ariadne's plight, supposedly enacted by Sebastian, is transferred to 'poor' Julia, and the supposed actor's fictive tears produce a similar response in the supposed observer, whose 'very sorrow' itself becomes a moving spectacle which communicates itself to the 'I' of the last line, a composite of Sebastian and Julia, performer and audience. The imagined 'whitsun pastoral' of Ariadne represents the truth of Julia's situation through a number of refracted

images of herself, all of them embodied, for the audience, in the person of a female character, dressed as and played by a boy, grieving for her unfaithful lover, recalling the performance of a play in which a male actor, dressed as a girl, portrayed a female character grieving for *her* unfaithful lover. Moreover, the language of the speech - 'pageants', 'played', 'play' (twice), 'part' (twice), 'passioning' and 'acted' - foregrounds the art of the theatre and hence the actual presence on stage of the actor who plays Julia.

In the theatre of illusion, this might risk compromising the audience's response to Silvia, also played by a boy. However, an audience accustomed to the conventions of the Elizabethan stage would presumably take this self-referential episode in its stride. Declan Donellan's 1991 production of *As You Like It* seems to have successfully negotiated the distinction between actual and performed gender for a modern audience:

Donellan used an all-male cast, defining his point by opening the evening with the beginning of "All the world's a stage" with the whole cast on stage, using "all the men and women" (2.7.140) as a means of dividing them into their gender roles for the performance. The gender of character was thus sometimes disconnected from the gender of actor and sometimes not. A male actor performing a female role was not therefore more performative than a male actor in a male role; instead the production allowed character to exist dissociated from performer. Gender became a construct of performance, and sexuality was placed within the control of character not actor.²²⁶

²²⁶ Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares: Shakespeare on the English Stage in the 1990s* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.91.

In the case of all Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines this 'control' is exerted by the text and the context, and sustained by the theatrical experience of an audience alert to all the nuances of performance conventions.

Among these conventions prologues and epilogues occupy a liminal status between the imagined, fictive world of the play and the everyday world beyond the theatre. Epilogues, in particular, are a means of loosening the imaginative rapport between player and spectator upon which all theatre depends. At the end of *As You Like It*, after the celebratory dance which concludes the play proper, the last words are spoken by a figure who may be identified as Rosalind, or Ganymede, or the boy player who has performed the role:

It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue ... If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not [.....].
[Epilogue 1-19]

In a modern production of the play, these lines make more sense if the actress playing Rosalind is still in male dress. As the androgynous Ganymede, she can exploit the teasing ambiguities of 'the lady the epilogue' and 'if I were a woman', 'prolonging the duplicity of self-discovery and self-concealment, the enchanting game of both/and'.²²⁷ However, the original boy-player could use these lines to create a transition from the play-world to the real world by beginning the speech in character as Rosalind, and resuming his own voice

²²⁷ Nevo, p.196.

and bearing on the line, 'If I *were* a woman', perhaps even removing his wig at that point to effect a metamorphosis from fictive girl to real boy, from character to performer. The transformation is striking, but not yet quite complete. The actor continues to flirt with the audience in the style of Rosalind/Ganymede - neither one thing nor the other, both one thing and the other, a theatrical hermaphrodite - until the audience's applause, by acknowledging the skill of his performance, confirms his true identity. Then, and only then, the Protean heroine disappears and is replaced by the Protean actor. This figure will be the subject of my next chapter.

V

I arrived at Skinner's personality through her voice. It led me to her rampageing wildness, to her self-mockery and finally to the pain sitting at the heart of her [---.]

It is alarming to meet the potential murderess in oneself, but I hope I have put her to bed until another such part comes along. Somehow the 'stranger' you first met becomes an extension of yourself that you did not know was there, moving and speaking in a way that is and is not you, even laughing with a laugh that is not quite your own. The new persona cannot be uncreated. You mined them from a deep place and now they are nearer the surface. You may never act them out again, but they remain lurking somewhere there, at the end of a phone line as it were, waiting for your call.

Harriet Walter: *Other People's Shoes*

Chapter V

Protean Monsters: Actors and Players

In the third part of *Henry VI*, otherwise known as *Richard Duke of York*, the Duke of Gloucester reveals to the audience his ambition to become king, and reviews the manipulative arts by which he intends to achieve his aim:

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
 And cry "Content"! to that which grieves my heart,
 And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
 And frame my face to all occasions.
 I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
 I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
 I can add colours to the chameleon,
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages
 And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

[*Richard Duke of York* 3.2.182-193]

The range of semantic and allusive reference in these lines combines ideas of deception - 'artificial', 'frame', 'deceive', 'slyly' - and force - 'murder', 'slay', 'take another Troy', 'murderous Machiavel' - with ideas of performance - 'play', 'change shapes', the rhetorical skills of Nestor, the eloquence of Ulysses, the mermaid's seductive song. The figure that combines all three of these notions is Sinon, the crafty Greek who persuaded the citizens of Troy to take the wooden horse inside their walls not merely by his circumstantial story of persecution by his countrymen but also by his histrionic ability: 'His

lacrimis vitam damus et miserescimus ultro' [To these tears we grant life and pity him besides].²²⁸ When Ian Holm played the part of Gloucester, in the Peter Hall/John Barton trilogy, *The Wars of the Roses*, as he finished speaking these lines he began to weep; as the audience watched in amazement, he covered his face with his hands and his shoulders shook with sobbing. Then the hands fell away to reveal Holm's triumphantly smiling face as he concluded the speech:

Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.
[3.2.194-195]

The universal gasp which greeted this was a tribute as much to the actor's skill as to Richard's chicanery. It was the perfect example of deception by craft, both in the sense of cunning (the character's) and technique (the performer's), and, as such, it produced a reaction of mingled disgust and delight. It was also an illustration of the two-fold nature of theatre as defined by Meredith Anne Skura: 'mimesis or rôle-playing [...] [and] establishing a "real" relation to the audience'.²²⁹ Gloucester himself is, of course, a consummate actor, and, throughout the first half of *Richard III* at least, the audience's horror at his mounting tally of crimes is tempered with admiration for the ease with which he conceals his malign intentions behind the masks of affectionate brother, faithful friend, jovial uncle and even impassioned lover. In his soliloquies he creates a 'real' relationship with the spectators who, through their inside

²²⁸ *Aeneid II*, 145.

²²⁹ Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.9.

knowledge, become only half-reluctant co-conspirators and accessories to his deeds.

Richard's career of double-dealing and duplicity reminds us that the Greek word for actor was *hypocrites*, a derivative of *hypokrinein*, to separate. The actor is the embodiment of that 'acceptance of disguise, the ability to effect a divorce, in Ascham's phrase, between the tongue and the heart'²³⁰ which Stephen Greenblatt sees as the essence of Renaissance self-fashioning, 'the power to impose a shape upon oneself [that] is an aspect of the more general power to control identity -- that of others at least as often as one's own.'²³¹ It is this manipulative, metamorphic power which gives rise to much of the prejudice against plays and playing from Plato to such Puritan critics as Stephen Gosson and William Perkins, who railed against the transformative effects of theatrical performance:

[...] the outward forme and favour that man hath, is the worke of God him selfe [...] Here comes to be justly reprov'd, the strange practise and behaviour of some in these daies, who being not contented with that forme and fashion, which God hath sorted unto them, doe devise artificiall formes and favours, to set upon their bodies and faces, by painting and colouring; thereby making themselves seeme that which indeed they are not.

Face-painting and disguise, the common practice of actors, are equated with

²³⁰ Greenblatt, p.228.

²³¹ Greenblatt, p.1.

impiety and deceit. The disparity between seeming and being is the basis of William Prynne's objections to acting, which he sees as contrary to the Divine will that men should 'be such in shew, as they are in truth; to seem that outwardly which they are inwardly'.²³² The actor's capacity to assume a different persona, to become an 'uncanny hybrid' of performer and role,²³³ is captured in Salvador Dali's portrait of Laurence Olivier in the role of Richard III, which shows a double image of the subject, one in theatrical costume and one in casual dress, so that the actor appears, literally, two-faced. In a poor performance the two elements are ill-matched -- one thinks of the hapless Sir Nathaniel's failure to convince in the role of Alexander the Great, 'a marvellous good neighbour, faith, and a very good bowler, but for Alisander - alas, you see how 'tis - a little o'erparted' (*Love's Labour's Lost* 5.2.576-579). When the actor successfully inhabits his role, however, like the First Player in *Hamlet*, the emotions experienced by his fictive, performed self produce a physical response in the actual, performing self: 'look wh'er he has not turned his colour, and has tears in's eyes' (*Hamlet* 2.2.522-523).

Actor and role may be seen as a set of twins; 'an apple cleft in two', (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.221) but Sybil Thorndike, quoted by Meredith Anne Skura on the experience of engaging with an audience, suggests that the player in performance is not so much a double self as a half self, a separated twin, searching, like Antipholus of Syracuse, for his/her 'other half':

²³² quoted in Barish, p.92.

²³³ quoted in Skura, p.26.

[We have a] curious sensation when entering the stage, as if of one's other half being waiting to be transformed. An expectant force is there, not just separate men and women but an entity, a personality in the larger common soul of the mob. This mob-soul is a force that is continually baffling us, it is always an unknown quantity [...]. Sometimes one knows it is a thing to be fought and struggled with in order to move it and use it [...]. At other times one is conscious of a something that is feeding one with life.²³⁴

The tension between performer and spectator described here is mutually threatening: on the one hand a potentially dangerous 'mob', on the other a combination of parasite and predator. However, the image of actor and audience as two halves of the same being also recalls the double monster of Plato's *Symposium*, the symbol of perfect, self-validating love. Double self or half self, validated by the role or validated by the audience, the actor defies, or rather eludes, definition. Perhaps it is this elusive quality which gave rise to the term, 'shadow' applied to stage players in the time of Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, for instance, 'a poor player' is equated with 'a walking shadow', (*Macbeth* 5.5.23) and Duke Theseus defends the cast of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' with the gentle reminder to Hippolyta, 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.210-211). Hippolyta's tart reply, 'It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs', (5.1.212) seems to confirm Dame Sybil's assessment of the importance of the audience in bringing a performance fully to life. The epilogue of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* picks up this image in Puck's farewell:

²³⁴ 'I look at the Audience', quoted in Skura, p.13.

If we shadows have offended,
 Think but this, and all is mended:
 That you have but slumbered here,
 While these visions did appear;
 And this weak and idle theme,
 No more yielding but a dream.
 [A *Midsummer Night's Dream* Epilogue 1-6]

Puck is a shadow in more senses than one: as an inhabitant of the fairy world (his master, Oberon is addressed as 'King of Shadows') (3.3.348); as a figure in the fictive 'dream' world of the play and as an actor, stepping out of that world to appeal directly to the audience for their applause: 'Give me your hands, if we be friends' (Epilogue 15).

The association of shadows with dreams and visions emphasises the transitory, insubstantial nature of theatre. It recalls Plato's image in the *Republic* of the material world as a shadow-play cast on the wall of a cave by the unseen 'forms' in which true reality resides. If life as we know it is a shadow of reality, and art, including drama, is a shadow of life, then actors are mere shadows of a shadow. Plato's cave fable reminds us that a shadow is an image cast by the shape of a person or thing, and, as M.M. Mahood points out, '*shape*, besides being the essential form of something, has more commonly in Shakespeare the meaning of a theatrical costume or disguise'.²³⁵ This invites the disquieting conclusion that the role has more substance than the performer, a conclusion apparently verified by Julia's rueful comment, as she accepts Silvia's portrait, 'Come, shadow, come and take this shadow up' (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 4.4.193-194). Her disguise as Sebastian has become her

²³⁵ M.M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London : Methuen, 1957), p.123.

substance, and her true self has been reduced to a shadow, no more real than the two-dimensional representation of her rival. The potentially destabilizing relationship between ‘show and essence, name and thing, clothes and bodies’ is seen by Dennis Kay as ‘wrapped up in the Renaissance mind [...] with the question of identity and self-knowledge’.²³⁶ He illustrates this concern by relating an episode in ‘A History of Private Life’, a novella by Giovanni Sercambi:

A furrier from Lucca went to a public bath, and took off all his clothes. He was horrified at the thought that [without them] he might not know who he was. So he put a straw cross on his shoulder, in order to mark his identity. Unfortunately, a neighbour in the bath house seized the straw cross, and said to the furrier, “Now I am you; begone, you are dead”. The furrier lost his wits, convinced that he was dead.²³⁷

The actor-as-shadow, then, presents a threatening image of total *anomie*, a man without a self. Professional players, however, unlike Julia and the Lucca furrier, assumed a variety of ‘shapes’. The surviving plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins* (c.1592) is cited by Peter Thomson as evidence ‘that an actor might play as many as six parts in a single play’²³⁸ suggesting that Elizabethan audiences may have taken ‘a delight in doubling that was intentionally conspicuous rather than disguised’.²³⁹ The actor in question, identified by Dennis Kay as Richard Cowley, could indeed claim to ‘change shapes with Proteus for advantages’ as he wrestled with a succession of quick changes. To the anti-theatrical polemicists this protean adaptability and shadowy insubstantiality

²³⁶ Kay, p.226.

²³⁷ Kay, p.266.

²³⁸ Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.80.

²³⁹ Thomson, p.80.

were both monstrous and potentially infectious. Laura Levine claims that they feared that by constantly reshaping themselves (or, rather, being reshaped by the roles they played) the players were able to reshape the audience in their image, that ‘the actor or spectator can be turned into another person because he isn’t really anything himself’.²⁴⁰ For example, despite Prynne’s assertion that God has given a ‘uniforme, distinct and proper being to every creature’,²⁴¹ his anxiety about transgressing boundaries, especially boundaries of gender, betrays a fear of fluidity, instability, the breaking down of fixed categories, which is shared by Phillip Stubbes and Stephen Gosson. For the former, Levine believes, ‘the hermaphrodite actor, the boy with the properties of both sexes, becomes the embodiment of all that is frightening about the self’,²⁴² whilst, *pace* his references to Deuteronomy, Gosson’s real objection to the male adoption of female dress is that it leads to an effeminization of the wearer; in Levine’s words, ‘he claims that wearing women’s clothing is wrong because it is a lie, but he implies that wearing women’s clothing is dangerous because it can become the truth.’²⁴³

It is not merely cross-dressing, however, which Puritan critics of the theatre find objectionable. As Jonas Barish argues, their mistrust of theatrical *mimesis* has its origin in the Platonic theory of personality, based on the premise that

²⁴⁰ Laura Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.16.

²⁴¹ Levine, p.18.

²⁴² Levine, p.19.

²⁴³ Levine, p.21.

each man is endowed by nature with one chief talent which must form the basis for his role in society.²⁴⁴ nowhere is this tenet defied more comprehensively than in the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', in which a weaver, a bellows-mender, a joiner, a tailor and a tinker transform themselves respectively into a hero, a woman, an animal, a natural phenomenon and an inanimate object. In every case, however, the transformation is grotesquely incomplete, recalling Bottom's earlier monstrous metamorphosis. This is not merely the result of their lack of histrionic talent - though as Ovid's star-crossed lovers Bottom and Flute are decidedly 'o'erparted' - but because of the way in which the three non-human 'characters' are 'presented'. The naive compromise between realism and symbolism creates an awkward disjunction between performer and role which their critical audience delight in exploiting; thus Snout's declaration, 'In this same interlude it doth befall | That I, one Snout by name, present a wall' (5.1.154-155) calls forth the derisive response:

Theseus:	Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?
Demetrius:	It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard.
	[5.1. 165-166]

Theseus and Demetrius ignore (or pretend not to notice) the fact that Snout is addressing them in *propria persona*; instead they attribute his words to the wall which he represents and in which 'shape' he appears. The confusion between shape and shadow creates a monster, a talking wall.

²⁴⁴ Barish, p18

For all its shortcomings in execution, however, the mechanicals' play is truly protean in its aspirations, a comic realisation of Ficino's *Theologica Platonica* as summarized by Jonas Barish: 'for Ficino [...] the soul of every man partakes of both the upper and lower worlds; it inhabits every gradation of the cosmos; it ascends and descends; it possesses the powers of all things; it transforms itself into all things'.²⁴⁵ Indeed, the spectacle of Bottom and his companions embodying every sphere of being, from wall to heroic lover, for the entertainment of Theseus and his guests, recalls Vives' version of the *theatrum mundi*:

In Vives' Fable of Man, Jupiter creates the universe for Juno's amusement, in the shape of a giant theater, stationing the other gods about it as spectators, and peopling the stage with the lower creatures as actors. The last actor to take his place is man, who proves to be the most expert. As the astonished gods look on, man impersonates first a plant, then each of the savage beasts in turn, then a social being, then a star, and finally a god'.²⁴⁶

Bottom, with his eagerness to play not only Pyramus but Thisbe and the lion, is the comic epitome of Renaissance self-fashioning. In his metamorphic state he fulfils all these ambitions; as an ass he shares the lion's bestial nature, as the object of Titania's wooing he resembles Thisbe and as her lover he achieves the status of Pyramus. And when his fairy mistress promises, 'I will purge thy mortal grossness so | That thou shalt like an airy spirit go' (3.2.152-153) he approaches the apotheosis described in Vives' fable: 'The other gods [...] request Jupiter to invite this wondrous creature to join them in heaven. At

²⁴⁵ Barish, p.108

²⁴⁶ Barish, p.110

this point, then, man, “so diverse, so desultory, so changing like a polypus and a chameleon”, becomes himself an immortal’.²⁴⁷ The ease with which Bottom accommodates himself to his altered state reveals that, whatever his limitations as a player, he is possessed of the true protean spirit.

In his hybrid state, half beast, half ‘airy spirit’, Bottom is both a comic monster and an epitome of the human condition. In this respect, the figure of the metamorphosed mechanical fulfils Hamlet’s definition of the purpose of theatre, ‘to hold [...] the mirror up to nature’ (*Hamlet* 3.2.22). The image of theatre as mirror occurs in Lodge’s *Honest Excuse*, a reply to Gosson’s *Schoole of Abuse*, where he attributes it ‘at third hand by way of Bodius Ascensius, [to] the Ciceronian definition of comedy as “an imitation of life, a mirror of manners, and an image of truth”,’²⁴⁸ but it can be traced back to Aristotle’s theory of mimesis as a process which ‘enables [men] to acquire true knowledge, since in coming to “imitate” particulars, or to witness such imitations, they learn valid general truths about the world’.²⁴⁹ When Richard II smashes the looking-glass he has called for after his abdication, Bolingbroke calls attention to the theatricality of the gesture: ‘The *shadow* of your sorrow hath destroy’d | The *shadow* of your face’ (*Richard II* 4.1.282-283). Richard’s reply,

‘Tis very true; my grief lies all within,
And these external manner of laments

²⁴⁷ Barish, p.110

²⁴⁸ William A. Ringler Jr, ‘Hamlet’s Defense of the Players’, in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig* ed. by Richard Hosley, (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 201-211 (p.204).

²⁴⁹ Barish, p.28.

Are merely shadows of the unseen grief
 That swells with silence in the tortured soul.
 There lies the substance, [4.1.285-289]

suggests that not only his mirror-image but his own self-dramatising behaviour are less real than his sorrow. Hamlet, however, asserts that the theatre proper is a mirror which shows essence rather than appearance, 'virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure', (*Hamlet* 3.2.22-24). 'Feature' and 'image' refer to externals but 'form' (with its Platonic associations) and 'pressure' connote substantial reality. At these lines, in Stephen Pimlott's modern-dress production for the RSC in 2001, the house lights came up and for several highly charged moments the actors onstage turned towards the audience and steadily returned our gaze. The performers' contemporary clothes created a sense of identification with the spectators, yet at the same time the sense of exposure produced by the lighting was curiously alienating. It was an uncomfortable and intensely powerful lesson in the principles which, according to Maynard Mack 'underlie to some extent our experience of any art, [namely] engagement and detachment'.²⁵⁰ To identify closely with drama 'becomes an exercise in narcissism - a means not to self-knowledge but to self-indulgence'.²⁵¹ The conventions of early modern drama, its all male casts, its non-realistic settings, its recourse to soliloquy and aside, above all its use of poetry as a means of expression, ensure that 'the mirror remains a mirror, and

²⁵⁰ Maynard Mack, 'Engagement and Detachment in Shakespeare's Plays' in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama In Honour of Hardin Craig*, ed. by Richard Hosley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp255-296 p.275.

²⁵¹ Mack, p.276.

our pleasure in the face we see in it comes as much from the fact that we know it to be a reflection as from the fact that it is a face we know'.²⁵²

In Ovid's account of the Narcissus story, the youth does not, presumably, recognise his own face in the pool, nor does he recognise it as a reflection. A. D. Nuttall analyses the way in which Ovid suggests the interplay between reality and reflected image by shifts of mood from active to passive: 'Se cupit imprudens et, qui probat, ipse propatur, dumque petit, petitur pariterque accendit et ardet' (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 425-426).

In his folly he desires himself, he who does the appreciating is himself the one who is appreciated, even when he pursues he is pursued, equally he kindles the fire and is the flame which burns ... Ovid magically closes a gap which we know cannot be closed. The object is the subject. But that which introspects is never identical with that which is introspected ...²⁵³

A similar interplay of active and passive roles occurs in the theatre; the performers act while the audience passively watch and listen, yet as they do so they reflect upon what they see and hear and thus objectify the action of the drama. This is particularly true of complex plays such as Shakespeare's which 'do not show us clear, direct statements of set moral or intellectual attitudes,

²⁵² Mack, p.277.

²⁵³ Nuttall, p.142.

but rather offer us the mystery of human motivation [...] and a multiplicity of points of view and ambiguous events ...'.²⁵⁴

One of the subtlest and most elusive of these plays is *Hamlet*, and its hero is probably Shakespeare's most protean character. Stanley Wells describes him as 'melancholy and gay, charming and cynical, thoughtful and flippant, tender and cruel, calm and impassioned, noble and vindictive, downcast and witty [...],²⁵⁵ and one may add vulnerable and dangerous, sensitive and callous, self-absorbed and self-critical to the list. Just as Bottom represents the mediaeval concept of humanity, occupying a median position on the Great Chain of Being between the bestial and the spiritual levels, so Hamlet epitomizes the Renaissance view of man, articulated by Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, as a creature of infinite possibilities. When Hamlet says he eats 'of the chameleon's dish' (3.2.90) he is referring to the traditional belief that these creatures fed on air; however, he could well claim, with Richard of Gloucester, that he can 'add colours to the chameleon', (*Richard Duke of York* 3.1.191) as he adapts his personality to suit his company, open-hearted and affectionate with Horatio, satirical with Polonius, wary and acerbic with Claudius, affable with the players and so forth.

Hamlet is a hall of mirrors. It is full of reflections, some clear, some distorted. As young men avenging their dead fathers, Fortinbras and Laertes

²⁵⁴ Alvin B. Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theatre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.65.

²⁵⁵ Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: The Poet and His Plays* (London: Methuen, rev. edn 1997), p.204.

are mirror-images of Hamlet, Claudius is a warped reflection of his dead brother and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, though clever actors may find ways to differentiate between them, are virtually indistinguishable, as their reception at Elsinore makes plain: Claudius' 'Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern' (*Hamlet* 2.1.33) is echoed (and perhaps corrected) by the Queen's 'Thanks Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz' (2.1.34). When the players arrive, the number of mirrors is multiplied. Hamlet's request to the First Player to perform Aeneas' speech recounting Pyrrhus' act of revenge for Achilles' death is clearly inspired by his own predicament. However, as Alvin B. Kernan points out, Pyrrhus is both 'the ideal revenger [...] and as such the model of what Hamlet so often feels he ought to be and what the Ghost urges him to be [and] [...] an image of such terror that he is a living argument against revenge'.²⁵⁶ Hamlet's reaction to the speech, moved as much by the player's impassioned delivery as by the lines themselves, is, as Michael Pennington observes, one of the many instances of metatheatrical reference in the play:

The effect of a player being so moved by a revenge that could be Hamlet's and being admired by the player of Hamlet who then, in a soliloquy of great virtuosity itself, expresses shame at not being moved enough to act, brings on an odd theatrical vertigo: Shakespeare's experiment initiates something that Pirandello rather overworked three centuries later.²⁵⁷

This speech is both an opportunity for the actor to display his histrionic technique and a comment on the nature of performance; it questions the relevance of fiction - 'what's Hecuba to him' - and yet insists upon the

²⁵⁶ Kernan, p.97.

²⁵⁷ Pennington, p.73n.

emotional truth of the play's fictive premise, 'the motive and the cue for passion' that Hamlet has:

O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
 Is it not monstrous that this player here
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his whole conceit
 That from her working all his visage wanned,
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing.
 For Hecuba!
 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
 That he should weep for her? What would he do
 Had he the motive and the cue for passion
 That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
 Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
 Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
 The very faculty of eyes and ears.

[*Hamlet* 3.2.352-368]

The player's performance is 'monstrous' because it is a hybrid of actor and role. The actor, like all human beings, is made up of two elements, body and soul; the character's body is the actor's, and its 'soul' is 'conceit', imagination. Because of the hybrid nature of the player in performance, the character's soul has produced physical symptoms (pallor, tears, huskiness) in the actor.

The lines resonate with the different meanings attached to the words, 'act' and 'passion'. To act can mean either to perform an action or to put on a performance; passion can be either intense emotion or the enactment of that emotion. Hamlet, who has been enjoined by his father's ghost to perform an act of revenge, reproaches himself not for *doing* nothing but for *saying*

nothing, for failing to perform his suffering in an appropriate fashion. He blames himself for his inadequacy not as an avenger but as an actor. 'Passion' derives from the same root as 'patience': *patior-ti-ssus*. From this point of view, the Player and not Pyrrhus is the mirror-image of Hamlet, in whom he sees the possibility of enacted passion, 'tears, [...] horrid speech' which he contrasts with his own unmanly patience:

Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
[...]
'Swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should 'a' fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. [2.2.574-584]

The idea of acting (performance) begins to give way to the idea of action (deeds) though Hamlet still continues to emulate the player's passionate speech:

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance! [2.2.583-584]

Though he immediately repudiates this histrionic rant, it appears to have effected a kind of *katharsis*, as he concludes the soliloquy in calmer, more lucid tones, with the idea of 'The Mousetrap' as a means of 'catch[ing] the conscience of the King' (2.2.607). It is as if observing the effect of theatre on his own inner anguish has made him aware of its potential as a means of revealing hidden truth and exposing guilty knowledge. In style and content the speech is both theatrical and metatheatrical. It provides the actor with

opportunities for displaying intense emotion - 'O vengeance!' - engagement with the audience -- 'who calls me coward?' -- and an exit, on a triumphant couplet, which almost demands a round of applause, partly for Hamlet's ingenious scheme to expose Claudius but mostly for the performer's skill in bringing off a showy but difficult piece of theatre.

In its emphasis on the 'monstrous' nature of performance, its interplay between truth and fiction, 'passion' and 'conceit', this speech foregrounds a central issue of the play. Indeed, Michael Pennington suggests that *Hamlet* is itself a kind of monster, 'neither one thing nor the other, not quite a political epic, nor yet a study of kingship, nor of intimate character and relationships'.²⁵⁸ Directors tend to concentrate on one or other aspect of this multifaceted text: in Matthew Warchus' production for the RSC in 1997 it was a family tragedy; Stephen Pimlott's in the same theatre four years later was highly political; John Caird's for the National Theatre in 2000 emphasised the religious and metaphysical context of the play. John Barton, for whom Pennington played the Prince at Stratford in 1980, chose to explore the ambiguous relation between theatre and life as 'not only a crucial thematic element but a dilemma for Hamlet as a character'.²⁵⁹ Thus, during 'To be or not to be' Pennington 'seized a prop from the players' basket at the side of the stage and contemplated suicide with a dagger of lath'.²⁶⁰ Similarly, throughout the 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy, he used the First Player's

²⁵⁸ Pennington, p.18.

²⁵⁹ Dawson, p.151.

²⁶⁰ Dawson, p.151.

sword, cloak and mask to turn himself into the conventional theatrical revenge hero. Dawson's description of the staging of this production shows how strongly it foregrounded the metatheatrical elements in the play:

The [acting] platform occupied only part of the large, mostly empty stage; there were a few benches around the platform (sometimes used by "offstage" actors) and various theatrical accoutrements, such as thundersheet and costume racks, but there was no attempt to provide a "set" [...]. The audience was to witness how a performance is born, how the "real" is not only represented but constructed.²⁶¹

The 'real' life of Elsinore was thus seen as a series of dramatic improvisations, an exercise in role playing in which Hamlet's 'antic disposition' and Claudius' regality were equally 'counterfeit'. The play is full of words associated with performance: 'counterfeit' itself, 'play', 'shape', 'shadow', 'plot', 'part', 'cue', 'prologue', 'audience', and 'scene'. Almost the last words Hamlet speaks are an allusion to the two sets of witnesses to his death, the onstage spear-carriers and the offstage spectators, and a cue to both as to how they should respond to the event:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act. [5.2.286-287]

Like the First Player, whose 'visage wann'd' at the death of Priam, the theatre audience, no less than the horrified courtiers on stage, are expected to register 'distraction in [their] aspect'. The lines invite intense engagement with the onstage action, and yet they are never allowed to forget that what they are

²⁶¹ Dawson, p.152.

watching is an 'act'. Kernan writes that 'reality take[s] on the form of theatre in *Hamlet*'.²⁶² One might add that at moments such as this theatre takes on the form of reality. What's Hamlet to us, that we should weep for him? But we do.

Nowhere in *Hamlet* is the interplay between drama and life more pronounced than in the play scene. In 'The Murder of Gonzago', Shakespeare introduces a second layer of fiction, observed not merely by the theatre audience but by a second, onstage audience, comprising the court of Denmark. Thus we do not merely watch the players' performance; we also watch those who are watching it, and, because we are privy to Hamlet's plan to expose Claudius, we watch Hamlet and Horatio watching him. In order to focus our attention, the dramatist has to establish a clear distinction between Vienna, in which the action of 'The Mousetrap' takes place, and Elsinore. His use of formal, slightly archaic couplets, and highly stylized conventions - the dumb show - has the effect of normalizing the blank verse and heightened prose of *Hamlet*, so that when the Player King faces Claudius what the audience sees is not two actors playing the roles of kings but one 'real' king and one actor. 'The Murder of Gonzago' does indeed 'hold [...] a mirror up to nature', but what that mirror shows depends on the viewer's knowledge of the 'truth'. For Claudius, and for the theatre audience, who have seen and heard the ghost, it reflects the circumstances of old Hamlet's death; for Gertrude, assuming, as we surely must, that she is innocent of her husband's murder, it is, at best, an

²⁶² Kernan, p.103.

embarrassing and insulting reference to her 'o'er hasty marriage', (2.2.57). Her tense comment, 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks' (3.2.219) gives nothing away. For the courtiers, the play is simply a tasteless exhibition, apparently designed by the Prince to offend his mother and stepfather which, in conjunction with Hamlet's sarcastic commentary and bawdy biplay with Ophelia, must leave them thanking their stars that when the late king died, the election lighted on his brother instead of his deranged and dirty-minded son.

Hamlet's behaviour during the performance of 'The Mousetrap' is imprudent, to say the least. Having devised a method of 'catch[ing] the conscience' of his homicidal uncle, he proceeds to sabotage his own scheme. Confronting Claudius with his guilt necessarily involves the dangerous revelation that he knows how King Hamlet met his death. Moreover, by identifying the murderer, Lucianus, as 'nephew to the king' (3.2.232) he utters a barely concealed threat against the King's life, thus shocking an already alienated court and eliciting sympathy for his father's murderer. Furthermore, the pointed allusions to second marriage, (which Michael Pennington likens to 'a bucket of dirty water thrown at his mother')²⁶³ give Claudius the perfect excuse to halt the proceedings and make a dignified withdrawal without exposing his guilt and fear to anyone save (possibly) Horatio and the offstage audience, who are already aware of it. In Peter Hall's 1965 production at the RST, Brewster Mason made his call for lights

²⁶³ Pennington, p.88.

a mark of “offended dignity”: he was publicly rebuking Hamlet for an impertinent “social gaffe” (*The Times*) i.e. for daring to enact a nephew’s murderous inclinations towards his uncle. But there was also a flicker of fear in his eye, noticeable to Hamlet, if not to the rest of the court. This led to an electric moment when the two met “eye to eye” with Claudius “silently accept[ing] the challenge of a duel to the death” (Mervyn Jones, *Tribune* 27 August).²⁶⁴

Ironically, the person who is most obviously affected by ‘The Mousetrap’ is Hamlet himself. As the play proceeds, his behaviour becomes more and more uncontrolled. Remembering how deeply he was moved by the First Player’s performance, this is hardly surprising; if Priam’s death, Pyrrhus’ revenge and Hecuba’s grief mirrored his own situation, how much more closely does this drama, partly written by himself, do so. The ‘some dozen or sixteen lines’ added to ‘The Murder of Gonzago’ by Hamlet are never positively identified (2.2.543). Michael Pennington claims they ‘never show up in the play’.²⁶⁵ However, the Player Queen’s protestations on the subject of second marriages bear the hallmarks of interpolations into the text, in that they are irrelevant to the main action and dwell insistently on Hamlet’s obsession with female inconstancy:

In second husband let me be accurst;
None wed the second but who killed the first
[...]
The instances that second marriage move
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed
[...]
Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
Sport and repose lock from me day and night,

²⁶⁴ Dawson, pp, 141-142.

²⁶⁵ Pennington, p.87n.

Each opposite that blanks the face of joy
 Meet what I would have well and it destroy,
 Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife
 If once a widow, ever I be wife.

[3.2.207-212]

If these lines are indeed composed by Hamlet, they are a further instance of his being distracted from the main purpose of the players' performance, to break down Claudius, in order to attack Gertrude, using, as Pennington says, 'his sexual revolt against his mother as an alibi for avoiding the difficult task of avenging his father'.²⁶⁶

Hamlet's uncontrolled behaviour throughout the play scene may be assumed madness or genuine hysteria brought on by the ordeal of seeing his father's murder and the love between his mother and stepfather enacted in the mirror of dramatic performance, a mirror, moreover, in which the reflected faces change, like figures in a nightmare, into new and frightening configurations; the Player King represents old Hamlet and his Queen, Gertrude; Lucianus, as regicide, stands for Claudius but, as nephew to the King, for Hamlet. (In Stephen Pimlott's Stratford production, Sam West's Hamlet and the player of Lucianus were about the same age and wore identical clothes). Thus, without pursuing Oedipal parallels too far, Hamlet may be said to confront, in his own image, the man who has killed his father and married his mother. There is no need, then, for an 'antic disposition' to account for his hypermania. Once again, the play explores the dangerous borderline between performance and reality, truth and fantasy. In one sense, however, that of clown or jester,

²⁶⁶ Pennington, p.91.

Hamlet does fulfil the role of 'antic' in this scene, as he persists in speaking the unspeakable, flouting courtly decorum with shocking innuendo and unwelcome home-truths, a function later assumed by the mad Ophelia.

Whether or not Hamlet is playing a part during the play scene, two other members of the onstage audience are undoubtedly doing so: Gertrude is dissimulating her true feelings with iron self-control, and, as for Claudius, he, as Michael Pennington points out, is 'giv[ing] the performance of his life'.²⁶⁷ In this respect, too, they are mirror-images of the Player King and Queen, and the question suggests itself, if both pairs are acting which are the 'true' monarchs? A performance by the King's Men in Hampton Court at Christmas, 1603, must have posed this problem in a particularly striking form. Alvin B. Kernan pictures the scene as James I and his Queen sat in state, surrounded by their court, watching Claudius and his Queen, sitting in state surrounded by their court, whilst between them the Player King and Queen performed for both audiences simultaneously. It must, as Kernan speculates, have been 'a true coup de theatre [...] causing all thoughtful spectators then and since to wonder which world was stage and which reality'.²⁶⁸ Their wonder might well have been compounded by the fact that, of the three monarchs present on that occasion, His Royal Majesty King James VI and I of Scotland and England must have been by far the least regal in appearance. No theatre company would have cast such an unprepossessing man as James Stewart with his weak

²⁶⁷ Pennington, p.87.

²⁶⁸ Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare: The King's Playwright: Theatre in the Stuart Court 1603-1613* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p.32.

legs and over-large tongue, in the role of king. A stage king's credibility, his legitimacy in the eyes of the audience, depends on their willingness to accept him in that role, therefore he must fulfil their expectations of monarchy: distinguished appearance, dignified bearing, resonant voice and if not 'an eye like Mars to threaten and command', (3.4.56), at the very least an imposing presence. James claimed his legitimacy by divine right, nevertheless he recognised that 'the power he was invested with [...] was to a large degree invested in him by the gaze of his subjects [and that] the royal image and identity were not wholly at the king's command but were in part the projection and hence the product of those subjects'.²⁶⁹ The Royal Command Performance of *Hamlet* revealed the power of theatre; it also exposed the theatricality of power.

Both monarchs and players had to perform in public, open to the praise or censure of the beholders. In *Basilicon Doron*, James wrote that 'a King is as one set on a skaffold, whose smallest actions and gestures all the people gazing by doe behold'.²⁷⁰ In later editions, 'skaffold' was changed to 'stage' but the words were interchangeable. The stage of the Globe Theatre was the 'unworthy scaffold' on which the exploits of another English king were displayed (*Henry V* Prologue 10), whilst the platform erected in the crossing of Westminster Abbey for the coronation of Elizabeth I was known as a

²⁶⁹ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.97.

²⁷⁰ quoted in Kernan, *King's Playwright*, p.19.

‘stage’ or ‘theatre’,²⁷¹ and James’ unhappy mother, Mary Queen of Scots, turned the scaffold at Fotheringay into a stage and her execution into a political and religious drama when, approaching the block, she removed her black gown to reveal that beneath it she was dressed from head to foot in red, ‘the colour of blood, and the liturgical colour of martyrdom in the Catholic Church’.²⁷² Anne Richter’s *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* discusses at length the relationship between ‘the king in his majesty and the poor player with his imitation crown’²⁷³ and the ‘flaws [...] in the nature of the king symbol itself which tend to bring reality closer to illusion’,²⁷⁴ particularly the investiture of ‘an eternal ideal’²⁷⁵ in a mortal individual:

At the moment of death, the king is parted from the role with which, since his coronation, he had seemed completely identified. It now appears plainly as a role, and his position becomes that of the Player King whose drama has come to an end.²⁷⁶

However, the theory of the king’s two bodies and more particularly the concept of demise, discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, emphasise even more strongly the disjunction between the ideal of monarchy and the man or woman who embodies that ideal. David Starkey points out that it was Mary Tudor’s funeral, not her death, which marked the end of her reign, as her ‘body politic, created by the *investing* rituals of coronation [...] survived the death of Mary’s

²⁷¹ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: Apprenticeship* (London : Chatto & Windus, 2000), p.271.

²⁷² Fraser, p.633.

²⁷³ Anne Richter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.102.

²⁷⁴ Richter, p.104.

²⁷⁵ Richter, p.104.

²⁷⁶ Richter, p.104.

natural body [and] would continue to survive until it was exorcised by the *divesting* rituals of a royal funeral, in which the image of monarchy was finally separated from the all-too-human carcass of the defunct sovereign'.²⁷⁷

Starkey's account of Mary's funeral Mass demonstrates the importance of this symbolic demise:

At the offertory of the mass the regalia were offered upon the altar: one by one the Queen's coat armour, sword, shield and banner of arms were returned, symbolically to the God who had bestowed them. Then, the mass ended, the Queen's image and all other tokens of royalty were removed from the coffin. The image was taken to St. Edward's Chapel, where Mary had retired (robed, crowned and sceptered like the image) after her coronation. Meanwhile the board coffin, stripped of majesty and now a merely human receptacle, was carried [...] to the great chapel built by [...] Henry VI [...]. A vault had been opened in the north aisle of the chapel and into this was lowered the body. Earth was cast on top. "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust": both Mary the woman and Mary the Queen had departed and the last trace of power was gone.

Next, each of Mary's officers of state and household broke his ward of office and threw the pieces into the grave on top of the earth: their power, too, had gone with their mistress's and its fragments were laid to rest with her.

The final disvestiture was performed by the heralds. They tore off their tabards and hung them on the hearse. Then, at long last, a month after Mary's physical death, the heralds raised their cry: "The Queen is dead; long live the Queen!"²⁷⁸

This ceremonial removal of the trappings of royalty, whether after death, as in the case of Mary Tudor, or before, as with Richard II, reveals them as so many glorious stage-properties, attributes of the role of kingship, to be handed on to

²⁷⁷ Starkey, p.250.

²⁷⁸ Starkey, pp. 255-256.

the next performer called upon to play the part. However, as Elizabeth realised, the idea of monarchy as performance could be turned to the ruler's advantage and, through elaborate ritual and ceremony, splendid accession-day tournaments and pageantry, she cultivated the myth of the Virgin Queen promulgated through poetry and portraiture as Cynthia, Phoebe, Flora, Diana, Aurora, Astraea, Deborah, Oriana, Belphebe and Gloriana. In her accession speech she embraced the theory of the King's Two Bodies, declaring, 'I am but one body, naturally considered [...] though by [God's] permission a Body Politic to govern',²⁷⁹ and throughout her reign she retained a 'conscious sense of her identity as at least in part a *persona ficta* and her world as a theater'.²⁸⁰

This strategy was not without its disadvantages, however. Puritan disapproval of the theatre could be directed towards the crown. Thus, William Rankins' anti-theatrical diatribe, significantly entitled *A Mirror of Monsters*, attacks 'the self-display not just of players ... but of the queen *as* player'²⁸¹ and warns that courtly masquerades 'will transform the commoners into a theatrical audience and the kingdom itself into a pagan theater ...'.²⁸² The monstrosity of the theatre, in Rankins' view, lay in the transgression of cultural boundaries, a phenomenon also noted by Stephen Gosson in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Just as, according to Rankins, the court is indistinguishable from the playhouse, so Gosson claims the playhouse dissolves the barrier between actor

²⁷⁹ quoted in Greenblatt, p.166.

²⁸⁰ Greenblatt, p.167.

²⁸¹ Jonathan V. Grewe, "The Theatre of the Idols: Theatrical and Anti-theatrical Discourse" in *Staging the Renaissance: Interpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* ed. by David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 49-56 (p.54).

²⁸² Grewe, p.54.

and audience. In the epistle to 'the Gentlewomen, Citizens of London' which concludes his tract, Gosson warns his readers of 'the danger posed to [them] by being gazed at by many men in the public space of the theatre',²⁸³ the danger, in short, of becoming a spectacle as well as a spectator. The situation of the respectable woman in a public theatre was ambiguous, 'unanchored from the structures of surveillance and control "normal" to the culture and useful in securing the boundary between "good women" and "whores"'.²⁸⁴ Howard attributes Gosson's hostility to the practice of female theatre-going to a fear that 'the entry of the middle-class woman into the house of Proteus, was part of a larger process of cultural change altering social relations within urban London and putting pressure on the gender positions and definitions upon which masculine dominance rested'.²⁸⁵

Distinctions of gender were challenged most directly, of course, by transvestite male players. Though anti-theatrical polemicists usually justified their denunciation of this practice by appealing to *Deuteronomy* xxii 5: 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God', they also seem to have been influenced by the Platonic view that 'imitation is formative - those who imitate will become what they imitate [...]'.²⁸⁶ Laura Levine sees in these tracts a fear of involuntary transformation,

²⁸³ Jean E. Howard, 'Women as Spectators, Spectacles and Paying Customers' in *Staging the Renaissance*, pp.68-74 (p.71).

²⁸⁴ Howard, pp.71-72.

²⁸⁵ Howard, p.73.

²⁸⁶ Barish, p.18.

a sense of the self as ‘neither fixed nor capable of shaping itself’²⁸⁷ but susceptible to alteration by external forces beyond its control. This view of the self denied the Aristotelian view of ‘*haecceitas*’ and implied that identity, even sexual identity, was essentially indeterminate; thus ‘the male actor, dressed in women’s clothing seemed to lack an inherent gender, and this seemed to make him monstrous’.²⁸⁸ Given what Patrick Cruttwell has defined as ‘the Puritan tendency [...] to see humanity as rigidly divided into the elect and the damned [...] [and] the general Puritan bent for dividing religious from secular, Church from state, Sunday from weekdays, levity from seriousness’,²⁸⁹ the breaking down of such a fundamental distinction as male and female threatened the very basis of their thought. Moreover, this disturbing sexual fluidity was not confined to the stage. Throughout the early years of the seventeenth century there was considerable disquiet caused by the fashion for women to wear such items of male attire as doublets and feathered hats. The principle attack on this form of partial cross-dressing, an anonymous tract entitled *Hic Mulier*, was not published until 1620, but Michael Shapiro notes that the phenomenon was observed ‘sometime shortly after the accession of James’²⁹⁰ and led to accusations of ‘usurping visual signs of maleness, thus blurring gender boundaries’.²⁹¹ The mirror of the stage, with its girl-boys and boy-girls reflected an ever more unstable world. In the ‘Houses of Proteus’ players performed miracles of shape-shifting, appearing as kings, murderers, soldiers,

²⁸⁷ Levine, p.11.

²⁸⁸ Levine, p.12.

²⁸⁹ Patrick Cruttwell, *The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the 17th Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), pp.141-143.

²⁹⁰ Shapiro, p.20.

²⁹¹ Shapiro, p.22.

citizens, queens, courtiers, courtesans, beggars and madmen. Offstage their status was ambiguous: as liveried servants of the nobility, they enjoyed the protection and patronage of the court, but during the all-too-frequent closures of the London playhouses they found themselves reduced to the status of itinerant entertainers at one remove from jugglers, ballad-sellers and dancing bears. 'The king's a beggar when the play is done' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, Epilogue 1) was almost literally true. It is hardly surprising that in the eyes of conservative critics the theatre represented a cultural and ideological instability whose consequences verged on the apocalyptic.

Nor were these fears entirely attributable to paranoia or obscurantism. They reflect a deep-seated unease beneath the Renaissance ideal of Protean man. A. Bartlett Giamatti points out that whereas Pico della Mirandola saw man's limitless potentiality for change as his greatest gift, Montaigne saw it as a curse, perceiving that 'Protean language - man immersed in the ocean of life, an ocean of flux inhabiting man - carries an edge of melancholy, a sense of fatigue, the promise of futility'.²⁹² The image is reminiscent of Antipholus of Syracuse's predicament:

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
[*The Comedy of Errors* 1.1.35-38]

²⁹² A. Bartlett Giamatti, 'Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance', in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, pp.437-475 (p.442).

Antipholus' search to find himself by finding his twin is born of the sense of 'vanity and emptiness' which Montaigne attributes to the universal human condition.²⁹³ A similar sense of emptiness can be detected in Shakespeare's most complexly Protean hero; Ronald Bryden saw in David Warner's Hamlet (directed by Peter Hall at Stratford in 1965) 'a man in search of an objective correlative, a cloud of immature and unfocused emotions in search of a means to express them',²⁹⁴ whilst a more recent Hamlet, Simon Russell Beale (National Theatre, 2000) has described the character as 'anonymous'.²⁹⁵ The dread of *anomie* at the heart of protean, self-fashioning humanity is not entirely without foundation. Moreover, if the self can be made and re-made with such facility, might it not somehow 'escape' and take on a life of its own? This is the terror of the doppelganger, the terror that the arch-shapeshifter, Richard of Gloucester, confronts in his tent the night before the battle of Bosworth:

Is there a murderer here? No. Yes. I am.
Then fly? What, from myself? Great reason. Why?
Lest I revenge. Myself upon myself?
[*Richard III* 5.5.138-140]

Perhaps even more alarming, though in comic mode, is Dromio of Ephesus' experience of returning to his master's house to find the door locked -- and to hear his own voice rudely denying him entrance: 'O villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office and my name' (*The Comedy of Errors* 3.1.44).

²⁹³ Giamatti, p.442.

²⁹⁴ Ronald Bryden, *The Unfinished Hero and Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p.64.

The idea of having one's identity 'stolen' is deeply disturbing and may be behind the uneasiness about representing real persons on the stage which prevailed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. True, Thomas Nashe argues in defence of the drama that it can confer immortality on the great heroes of the past:

How would it have joyed brave *Talbot* (the terror of the French)
To think that after he had lyne two hundred years in his Tombe,
Hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones
newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at
least (at several times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his
person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding?²⁹⁶

Heywood also celebrated this phenomenon and claimed that it could inspire feelings of patriotic pride and emulation in the audience:

What English blood seeing the person of any bold Englishman
presented and doth not hugge his fame, and hunneye at his
valour, pursuing him in his enterprise with his best wishes, and
as being rapt in contemplation, offers to him in his hart all
prosperous performance, as if the Personator were the man
personated, so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited
action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators
and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable
attempt.²⁹⁷

A modern instance of taking 'the Personator [for] the man personated' is related by Ian Richardson, who recalls the experience of playing Nehru on location in India: 'the people who were the extras actually thought I was a reincarnation of the man himself [and] had to be physically stopped from

²⁹⁵ Interview in *The Independent*, 26 January, 2002.

²⁹⁶ 'Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Divell', quoted in Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.17.

²⁹⁷ *An Apology for Actors* quoted in Rackham, p.113.

bending down and kissing my sandals [...]'.²⁹⁸ Phyllis Rackin points out that both defenders of the stage, such as Nashe and Heywood, and the anti-theatrical polemicists 'associate theatrical performance with sorcery',²⁹⁹ and Stephen Greenblatt notes the pervasive connection between the supernatural and the theatrical in contemporary religious controversy.³⁰⁰

If the appearance of dead heroes on the public stage was controversial, the presentation of a living personage was even more problematic, particularly when that personage was the king himself. One of the most remarkable events of James' reign, before he ascended the English throne, was the so-called Gowrie Conspiracy. According to the official version of events, the king had escaped from an ambush involving, somewhat improbably, a chest of gold and a man in armour, laid by the Earl of Gowrie and his brother. As Antonia Fraser comments, 'since both Gowrie brothers were troublesome and both were killed during the king's rescue, there were Scottish critics who suggested that the Gowrie Conspiracy was a set-up, a means of getting rid of the family'.³⁰¹ Nevertheless, on becoming King of England, James instituted a day of public thanksgiving to celebrate his deliverance. However, an anonymous play on the subject was withdrawn after only two performances. Alvin Kernan quotes a letter from the gossip John Chamberlain, speculating on the reason for the ban:

²⁹⁸ Carole Zucker, *In the Company of Actors: Reflections on the Craft of Acting* (London: A & C Black, 1999), p.135.

²⁹⁹ Rackin, p.114.

³⁰⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1988). pp.94-128. passim.

³⁰¹ Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Mandarin, 1997), p.66.

The tragedie of Gowrie with all the action and actors hath ben twice represented by the Kings players, with exceeding concourse of all sortes of people, but whether the matter or manner be not well handled, or that yt be thought unfit that princes should be plaide on the stage in theyre life time, I heare that some great counsaillors are much displeased with yt: and so is thought shalbe forbidden.³⁰²

It is a pity that the play never received a royal command performance, bringing face-to-face the royal protagonist of the story and his player-personator. But the mirror which theatre held up to nature was not always flattering, and seeing oneself reflected in it could be a disturbing experience. It would be interesting to know whether the actor playing the king imitated James' less attractive physical characteristics - probably not. Nevertheless, the very fact of impersonation had the effect of turning the royal person into a kind of monstrous hybrid, part monarch, part player, bearing the king's name and performing his actions, yet embodied by an actor and speaking the words of a playwright. It is perhaps not surprising that such a spectacle, displayed before 'exceeding concourse of all sorts of people' should give rise to displeasure among members of the royal council.

James claimed that his role in the Gowrie affair was that of innocent victim. In the case of undiscovered malefactors, however, Hamlet's confidence in the power of theatre to bring their guilt to light was apparently not altogether without foundation. Haywood's *Apology for Actors* cited two cases of women who confessed to murdering their husbands after seeing plays which

³⁰² Kernan, *The King's Playwright*, p.60.

reproduced the circumstances of their crimes; at a performance of *The History of Friar Francis* at King's Lynn

an apparently respectable woman in the audience [confessed] that seven years before she had poisoned her husband for love of a gentleman in precisely the same way as the protagonist in the play [...] [and] in the second case it was the method of murder shown on the stage which caused "a woman of great gravity" to shriek loudly and after several days of torment to confess that she had driven a nail into the temples of her husband twelve years before.³⁰³

It will be remembered that Proteus, among his other attributes, had the gift of prophecy and, if constrained until he resumed his rightful shape, would speak the truth. Paradoxically, the mythical figure of the 'deceitful actor'³⁰⁴ is also seen as the 'diviner of secrets and possessor of valuable truths'.³⁰⁵ In both capacities Proteus is both the patron and the symbol of theatre, which as Peter Hall pointed out in his Clark lectures delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge in 2000, portrays 'simulated actions and simulated emotions'³⁰⁶ yet is judged by the criterion of truth. This is the paradox which Hamlet meditates on in his 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy; the First Player's distress at the death of Priam is purely fictitious, yet in its expression it seems more authentic than his own feelings, and when he tries to give vent to those feelings the result is not 'true' passion but unconvincing rant: '[...] Bloody, bawdy, villain!

³⁰³ Catherine Belsey, 'Alice Arden's Crime', in *Staging the Renaissance* pp.133-150 (pp.139-140).

³⁰⁴ Giamatti, p.444.

³⁰⁵ Giamatti, p.450.

³⁰⁶ Peter Hall, *Exposed by the Mask: Form and Language in Drama*, (London: Oberon Books, 2000), p.16.

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain' (*Hamlet* 2.2.582-583).

Hall defines the difference between 'theatrical truth [and] the truth of everyday life'³⁰⁷ as form, which controls and refines raw emotion so that it is communicable to the audience:

Any defined form in the theatre performs as a mask: it releases rather than hides; it enables emotion to be specific rather than generalised. It permits control while it prevents indulgence. Form frees, it does not inhibit. And the mask -- whether it be the physical mask of the Greek theatre [or] the mask of Shakespeare's verse [...] is always *telling* us about the emotion rather than parading it.³⁰⁸

If one compares these lines of Hamlet's with the First Player's lament for Hecuba the distinction becomes clear:

[...] a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,
About her lank and all o'er teemèd loins,
A blanket in th' alarm of fear caught up;
[*Hamlet* 2.2.509-512]

The lightly stressed metrical beat and the open vowels free the voice and allow the speaker's emotion to communicate itself to the hearers, whereas in Hamlet's outburst the repetition, alliteration and internal rhymes turn the emotion back on itself, stifling free expression, and the exaggeratedly heavy stresses have the effect of muffling and suppressing the flurry of unaccented syllables, so that the words seem to be forced through clenched teeth. He can 'say nothing' (3.1.571) because expression is choked with emotion. Of course,

³⁰⁷ Hall, p.16.

³⁰⁸ Hall, p.26.

as the audience knows, this is itself a dramatic effect. Peter Hall asserts that 'however intense the experience, those on stage and those in the audience never, I believe, forget that they are in a theatre'.³⁰⁹ However, whilst this is clearly true I would suggest that the audience's knowledge is coloured by an imaginative acceptance of the events taking place on stage as having a kind of validity which Jonathan Bate has called 'performative truth'³¹⁰ which may be defined as truth enacted so as to be apprehended by imagination.

Theseus and Hippolyta are right when they stress the importance of imagination in successful performance:

Theseus:	The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.
Hippolyta:	It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs [<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> 5.1.210-213]

but neither the players' not the audience's imagination alone is sufficient to create performative truth, and the failure of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is the result of a failure of imagination on both sides. The mechanicals' over-literal interpretation of theatrical conventions creates an equal literal-mindedness in their audience, as poor Starveling discovers to his discomfiture:

Starveling (as Moonshine):	This lantern doth the hornèd moon present.
Demetrius:	He should have worn the horns on his head.
Theseus:	He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible within the

³⁰⁹ Hall, p.16.

³¹⁰ Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p.325.

circumference.
 Starveling (as Moonshine): This lantern doth the hornèd moon present.
 Myself the man i'th' moon do seem to be.
 Theseus: This is the greatest error of all the rest -- the man should be put into the lantern.
 How else is the man i'th' moon?
 Demetrius: He dares not come there for the candle; for you see it is already in snuff.
 Hippolyta: I am aweary of this moon.
 Would he would change [...].
 Starveling: All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon, I the man i' the' moon, this thorn bush is my thorn bush, and this dog my dog.
 Demetrius: Why, all these should be in the lantern, for all these are in the moon [...].
 [5.1.235-256]

Because the mechanicals do not understand the nature of performative truth, they are over-explicit in their efforts to 'bring the moonshine into a chamber' (2.2.44) and so fail to engage the imagination of their onstage audience. Some modern productions with their excessively elaborate stage sets and lighting effects make the same mistake. When Shakespeare wants to 'present moonshine' he simply has Oberon declaim, 'Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania' (1.2.60) - and there it is.

In the theatre, Oberon's words are akin to what the philosopher J.L. Austin defined as performative language, 'utterances which effect an action by the act

of being spoken [...]'.³¹¹ They have the effect of 'creating' moonlight for the audience. The heralds' proclamation of Elizabeth as Queen at the conclusion of Mary Tudor's funeral is an instance of such language which, as Philip Davies Roberts points out, 'demands unanimous social acceptance if it is to work'.³¹² In the theatre, this acceptance stems from a kind of unspoken contract between actors and audience. Thanks to the power of performative language, Oberon's words produce the effect of moonlight where Starveling and his accumulation of lunar appurtenances fails to do so. Jonathan Bate analyses the 'range of suasive linguistic effects [by means of which actors] make their audience believe - make them feel - the truth of the "voice" they are animating[:] intonation, pitch, pause, and gesture [which] contribute to the cumulative effect as much as argument, figurative device and image'.³¹³

The association between language in performance and performative language seems to have underlain some of the Puritan objections to theatre. Jonas Barish cites a polemical tract by Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Mass*, as 'a sustained attack on the theatricality of traditional worship',³¹⁴ and notes that 'John Rainolds, inveighing against the stage, finds room for particular censure of "Popish Priests", who 'have transformed the celebrating of the Sacrament of the *Lords Supper* into a *Masse-game*, and all other partes of the *Ecclesiasticall service* into theatrical sights' [...].'³¹⁵ And indeed Eamon

³¹¹ Bate, p.323.

³¹² Philip Davies Roberts, *How Poetry Works: The Elements of English Poetry* (London : Penguin. 1986), p.6

³¹³ Bate, p.329.

³¹⁴ Barish, p.161.

³¹⁵ Barish, p.163.

Duffy's account of pre-Reformation liturgy makes it quite clear that the Mass was a kind of sacred drama in which 'Christ himself, immolated on the altar of the cross, became present on the altar of the parish church body, soul and divinity, and his blood flowed once again, to nourish and renew the Church and the world'.³¹⁶ When the Priest, vested in cope and chasuble, pronounced the words of consecration, 'Hic est enim corpus meum', he was 'personating' Christ and the words themselves were performative; as they were spoken, the transubstantiation of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood actually took place. In the Communion Rite in the 1549 Prayer Book, however, the performative nature of the ceremony was entirely expunged:

[The rubric] stipulated that the communion was to be celebrated by a priest wearing neither cope nor vestment [...] but a simple surplice [...]. The celebration was to take place not "at God's board", a mediaeval term frequently used of stone altar, but at a table set in the body of the church [...], ordinary wheaten bread was to be used, and any bread or wine left after the celebration was to be taken home for domestic consumption by the curate, thereby abolishing any notion of consecration.³¹⁷

Thus, as the court was tainted for Rankins by association with the playhouse, so, for Rainolds, the playhouse was tainted by association with the Catholic Mass. Moreover, as Jonathan Bate points out, the persuasiveness of performed language was double-edged:

granted, the theatre presents to the public virtuous personae who are voiced so powerfully that one is moved to wish to be like

³¹⁶ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p.91.

³¹⁷ Duffy, p.474.

them. But the well-trained dramatist and actor will, with equal force, give voice to vicious personae.³¹⁸

Iago and Gloucester are as eloquent and persuasive as Rosalind and Viola.

And many of Shakespeare's most interesting characters—Cressida, Richard II, Hamlet—are too subtle and complex to be defined as either 'virtuous' or 'vicious'. Proteus was associated with 'the power of language and those powers unleashed by language'.³¹⁹ Shakespeare 'unleashed' the powers of language to create a mirror-image of humanity in all the Protean diversity.

³¹⁸ Bate, p.329.

³¹⁹ Giametti, p.459.

VI

As the procession drew nearer Ransom saw that the foremost *hrossa* were [---] guarding two creatures which he did not recognise [---]. They were much shorter than any animal he had yet seen on Malacandra, and he gathered that they were bipeds, though the lower limbs were so thick and sausage-like that he hesitated to call them legs. The bodies were a little narrower at the top than at the bottom so as to be very slightly pear-shaped, and the heads were neither round like those of *hrossa* nor long like those of *sorns*, but almost square. They stumped along on narrow, heavy-looking feet which seemed to press into the ground with unnecessary violence. And now their faces were becoming visible as masses of lumped and puckered flesh of variegated colour fringed in some bristly, dark substance [----]. Suddenly, with an indescribable change of feeling, he realised that he was looking at men.

C. S. Lewis *Out of the Silent Planet*

Chapter VI

Magus, Machiavel and Mooncalf:

The Monstrous in *The Tempest*

The ending of *The Tempest* is unusual in that the Epilogue is spoken entirely in character: unlike Rosalind/Ganymede who eventually reveals himself to be a boy player - 'If I were a woman' - or the epilogue in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who refers to his character in the third person as 'the Puck' and 'Robin', Prospero, as Stephen Orgel points out in his introduction to the Oxford edition, 'declares himself not an actor in a play but a character in a fiction; and, instead of stepping out of character, he expands the fiction beyond the limits of the drama'.³²⁰ The speech, like all epilogues, is a direct appeal to the audience, but it is not merely the conventional request for applause, admitting, in Ann Barton's phrase, 'the ruin of illusion'³²¹; instead, the audience is invited to project the illusion beyond the conclusion of the play into a fictional future:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
I must be here confined by you

³²⁰ *The Tempest*, ed. by Stephen Orgel, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1987), p.55.

³²¹ *The Tempest*, ed. by Anne Barton (London : Penguin, 1968), p.51.

Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
 Since I have my dukedom got,
 And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
 In this bare island by your spell;
 But release me from my bands
 With the help of your good hands.
 Gentle breath of yours my sails
 Must fill, or else my project fails,
 Which was to please. Now I want
 Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
 And my ending is despair
 Unless I be relieved by prayer,
 Which pierces so, that it assaults
 Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
 As you from crimes would pardoned be,
 Let your indulgence set me free.

[*The Tempest*, Epilogue 1-20]

I suggested in an earlier chapter that the function of an epilogue is to mark the transition from the world of the play to the real world; here, however, the 'real' world beyond the enchanted island is envisioned not as the streets of London but as the sea and the cities of Naples and Milan. Moreover, whilst the usual epilogue invites the audience to judge the play kindly -- 'I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women [...] that between you and the women the play may please' (*As You Like It*, Epilogue) Prospero's language - 'prayer', 'mercy', 'faults', 'crimes', 'pardoned', 'despair', 'indulgence' - suggests that the judgement he anticipates is Divine rather than human and the 'ending' he contemplates is not merely the conclusion of a dramatic fiction.

The relationship between the 'I' and the 'you' in this speech is a complex and delicate one: the audience is addressed both as spectators and arbiters of the drama, the ('project'), and as participants in the action; thus, they are invited not only to clap their hands in applause, but also to lend a hand at the sail-

ropes of Prospero's ship and to clasp their hands in prayer for his soul. Donna Hamilton sees this multi-layered quality, not in the implied audience but in the speaker. Unlike Orgel and Barton she believes that, in the epilogue, 'several voices are speaking at the same time',³²² a view based on her location of *The Tempest* in the context of *The Aeneid* and of Jacobean politics:

Prospero speaks as the duke on his way back to Naples, who, having given up his magic, is thinking about his new frailty [...] and considering his need for mercy, an important reconceptualization of the *meum et tuum* formula that is the center of the king-subject relationship. But because the epilogue moves away from the action of the play, Prospero also speaks as an actor, one who has played the part of ruler but who now, about to finish that part, suddenly stands as a subject - and, at a court performance, as a subject before his own king. Then, too, Prospero is the dramatist himself, who has used his art to enchant but must now ask for approval, rather than for forgiveness.³²³

There is a good deal of critical support for this view. As Stephen Orgel points out, for the past hundred and fifty years, *The Tempest* 'has been ... taken as a representation of Shakespeare himself bidding farewell to his art'.³²⁴ From this perspective, the epilogue can be seen as a meditation on the relationship between authorship and authority, between the power of the dramatist to 'enchant' his audience with visions of an imagined world and the power of the audience to accept or reject the imaginative reality of his creation. The 'project' of the drama is one in which both parties must be fully engaged if it is not to fail; 'what is presented to us', in Northrop Frye's phrase, 'must be

³²² Donna B. Hamilton, *Virgil and 'The Tempest': The Politics of Imitation* (Columbus : Ohio State University Press, 1990), p.135.

³²³ Hamilton, p.135.

³²⁴ Stephen Orgel, 'Prospero's Wife', in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 217-219 (p.220).

possessed by us' if the dramatist's art is to complete its final work of transformation:

We are told that the characters, as usual, will adjourn to hear more about themselves, but we need to follow them, for it is our own identity that we are interested in now. If anything is to make sense of this play, no less than of Peter Quince's play, it must be, as Hippolyta says, our imagination and not theirs.³²⁵

The imaginative interrogation of human identity - of what it means to be human and what are the limits of humanity - lies at the heart of *The Tempest*. If, as Hamlet claims 'the purpose of playing [...] is to hold [...] a mirror up to nature' (*Hamlet* 3.2.20-22), this play may be said to offer a triple mirror, in which the audience may view three reflected images of human nature, each of which contains an element of the non-human and hence of the monstrous: Prospero, the magician who possesses more than human powers; Caliban, 'the embodiment of Aristotle's bestial man'³²⁶, and Antonio, the disciple of Machiavelli, who has learned from him that, in matters of political necessity, the ruler must be prepared to make 'a rational choice [...] to partake of the beast'.³²⁷ These three key figures are associated with three distinct but complementary areas of action: the island, the world of the theatre and the political world represented by the opening scene on the king's ship and, retrospectively and proleptically, by Milan, Naples and Tunis - or perhaps it is

³²⁵ Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York and London : Columbia University Press, 1965), p.159.

³²⁶ Hankins, p.178.

³²⁷ Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (Bungay, Suffolk : Allen Lane, 1980), p.436.

truer to say that the island is the site where the two other worlds intersect.

The close links between Prospero's magic, his 'art', and the art of theatre have been noted by critics and directors alike. Agostino Lombardo, for instance, points out that

The Tempest [...] is played out entirely in a metatheatrical dimension, [...] in which Prospero is duke, magician, coloniser, father, but above all a man of theatre -- a dramatist who, with the help of Ariel (a spirit of the air but also and especially actor, mime, singer, dancer, the very symbol of theatre) invents the show of the tempest, makes objects and characters appear and disappear, in short plays at theatre.³²⁸

The theatricality of Prospero's magic highlights the quasi-magical power of theatre; even his vaunted ability to raise the dead can be matched in the playhouse where, as we saw in Chapter 5, 'Brave Talbot', the hero of the Hundred Years' War, is brought to life onstage in the person of an actor. Indeed, the performers in Prospero's theatrical presentations, the harpy feast and the betrothal masque, may be said to represent the quintessence of theatricality. As airy spirits Ariel and his fellows have no corporeal substance: they can appear to their audiences (onstage and off) only by assuming various guises, sea-nymph, harpy, goddess or - most significantly - the mysterious 'shapes' which bring on and remove the banquet. It will be remembered that 'shape', in Shakespeare's theatre, denoted a stage costume. Shadows without substance, these 'shapes' embody the privileging of mask over face, of

³²⁸ Agostino Lombardo, 'The Veneto, Metatheatre, and Shakespeare' in *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama* ed. by Michele Marrapodi, A. J., Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo and L. Falzon Santucci (Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 143-157 (p.143-144).

character over performer, of imaginative truth over literal truth which is the soul of theatre.

Nowhere is the power of this theatrical truth more clearly revealed than in the opening scene. The eponymous tempest, as far as the audience is concerned, is as 'real' as the storms in *King Lear* and *Julius Caesar*, and it comes as a shock to realise that it is an illusion created by Prospero, a *coup de théâtre* which, in Peter Hall's 1974 production for the National Theatre, impressed Robert Cushman as 'the first of a series of inspired transformations'.³²⁹ Hall's approach, according to Cushman, was both literally fabulous and intensely realistic:

He begins with a thoroughly convincing storm, the hard-working, hard-lurching sailors beset by a bunch of troublesome courtiers scrambling up from a cabin below decks. At the close of the scene the roof of their cabin slams shut; standing on it ... is Prospero, the controller of the tempest and of the play.³³⁰

This is the first of many indications that *The Tempest* is a play in which 'the convention that enables what audiences know are theatrical illusions to function as signs of actualities within the dramatic fiction is no longer a reliable frame of reference'³³¹, a play, moreover, whose action is initiated and directed by a single character, as Irving Wardle, reviewing Hall's production, observed: 'This version encases the entire work in a frame of masque-like

³²⁹ Robert Cushman, *Observer*, 10 March 1974, quoted in *Acting Shakespeare* by John Gielgud (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.128.

³³⁰ Cushman in Gielgud, p.128.

³³¹ Philip C. McGuire, *Shakespeare: The Jacobean Plays* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1994), p.177.

artifice, which Prospero supervises in the role of a sublime stage-manager'³³². Sam Mendes' production for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1993, which also drew heavily on theatrical references - a property-basket, a ventriloquist's dummy for Trinculo, a giant Pollock's toy theatre for the masque - emphasised this all-seeing control by siting Alec McCowen's Prospero at the top of a ladder at the back of the stage for many of his scenes making him appear, literally as well as metaphorically, a *deus ex machina*. For Donna Hamilton, however, the exiled magus' quasi-divinity is Olympian, rather than theatrical. She notes the ways in which Prospero repeats the actions of Virgil's deities in *The Aeneid*, a work which she sees as providing a thematic model for *The Tempest*:

Like Aeolus, Prospero has 'Put the wild waters in this roar' (1.2.2); like Neptune, he has 'safely ordered' (1.2.29) so that the victims of the storm do not suffer great harm; and like Jupiter, who comforted the fearful Venus ('spare thy fear', *parce metu*, 1.2.57), he tells Miranda, 'Be collected [...] tell your piteous heart | There's no harm done' (1.2.12-14). Later in the scene, Prospero replicates more godlike patterns when he oversees the young love of Ferdinand and Miranda, as Venus and Juno oversaw that of Dido and Aeneas and, when he issues commands to Ariel, as Jupiter did to Mercury.³³³

The true source of Prospero's god-like status, however, may well be neo-Platonic, rather than Virgillian. His ability to control the elements, to enervate or restore to vigour, to induce sleep and to awaken, recall the miraculous

³³² Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 6 March 1974, in Gielgud, p.126.

³³³ Hamilton, p.108.

power over nature -- to 'call upon the winds, force the clouds to rain, chase away fogs [and] cure the diseases of human bodies' which Ficino ascribes to the initiate and which, according to Stephen McKnight, constitute 'the core of [his] understanding of human nature: 'the entire striving of our soul is that it become God'.³³⁴ Ficino claims that man, uniquely among all creatures, is capable of aspiring to divinity by the exercise of reason. Prospero's books - 'volumes that | [He] prized above his dukedom' (*The Tempest* 1.2.167-168) - symbolise his commitment to developing his intellectual capacities at the expense of his political duties, a sequestration from mundane affairs which also has a neo-Platonic model; the highly influential *Oratio* of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola praises the *vita contemplativa* and expresses 'a truly Platonist scorn for those whose whole life is dedicated to the pursuit of profit or ambition in the public realm'³³⁵. However, although Pico asserts that 'a life of contemplative *otium* [is] [...] an indisputable condition of all the noblest of human pursuits, above all the pursuit of truth'³³⁶, Prospero's neglect of *negotium* creates a power vacuum which is filled by his ambitious and unscrupulous brother and leads to the subjection of Milan to Neapolitan rule and to his own and Miranda's exile.

Once arrived on the island, moreover, Prospero uses the knowledge derived from his precious volumes not for contemplation of the truth but for coercion, enslaving Caliban, enforcing Ariel's service, controlling the actions of the

³³⁴ McKnight, p.47.

³³⁵ Quentin Skinner, 'Political Philosophy' in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 389-452 (p.429).

³³⁶ Skinner, p.429.

courtiers and their retainers and even compelling Miranda to sleep and wake at his command. Though the quasi-divine nature of Prospero's power isolates him from the other characters, in this respect, at least, he is not alone. A notable stylistic feature of *The Tempest* is the number of verbs in the imperative mood; the ship's master gives orders to the bo'sun, Prospero issues instructions to Ariel, Ferdinand begs Miranda to tell him her name, Gonzalo enjoins Alonso to cheer up, Antonio incites Sebastian to kill his brother, Stephano bosses Trinculo about and Caliban urges them both to help him kill Prospero. Some of these are polite requests rather than downright commands - 'Vouchsafe my prayer' (1.2.423), 'Prithee, say on' (2.1.232), 'Give me your hands' (5.1.213) - nevertheless, it would seem that everyone in this play is concerned to order, instruct, persuade, implore or cajole their fellows to do their will. Even more striking is the preponderance of words concerned with power-relationships, with the discourse of authority and service: 'master', 'slave', 'servant', 'homage', 'tribute', 'commands', 'subjects', 'traitor', 'banished', 'sovereignty' etc. It is for these textual reasons, rather than because of any post-colonial associations, that I would argue that *The Tempest* is a political play. Within a field of reference which embraces neo-Platonic humanism and the political theories of Aristotle, Montaigne and Machiavelli, it explores the monstrous dimension in human nature and how this influences the ways in which individuals organise themselves into communities.

The word 'monster' occurs forty-two times in *The Tempest*. Forty-one of these references apply to Caliban. However, the first mention of the word is in a

different and highly significant context: when, thanks to Ariel's intervention, Antonio and Sebastian are foiled in their attempt to kill Alonso and his attendants, Sebastian explains their drawn swords by claiming that they have heard 'a hollow burst of bellowing, | Like bulls, or rather lions' and Antonio confirms his story with the assertion, 'O 'twas a din to fright a monster's ear [...]'. [2.1 316-319] Later, Alonso's response, on being reminded of the *coup* against Prospero by the 'harpy' is 'O, it is monstrous, monstrous'. [3.3.95] In their single-minded devotion to self-interest and their unscrupulous pursuit of power, the King of Naples and his brother and the usurping Duke of Milan are disciples of Machiavelli, who asserted that, in order to succeed, a ruler must be a monster, that is to say, he must be prepared to act as both a man and a beast. Whereas Christian Humanist philosophers had 'continually quoted and applauded [...] [Cicero's *dictum*] [...] that a virtuous man should gain his ends by communication and persuasion rather than by force or treachery, the tactics appropriate to animals - the lion and the fox respectively', Machiavelli argued that 'the prince must sometimes act the powerful, decisive lion, sometimes the wily, elusive fox'³³⁷. Machiavelli appropriates the mythical figure, Chiron the centaur, to rebut Cicero's argument:

There are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man. The ancient writers taught princes about this by an allegory, when they described how Achilles and many other princes of the ancient world were sent to be brought up by Chiron, the centaur, so that he might train them his way. All the allegory means, in making the teacher half

³³⁷ Antony Grafton, *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli, trans. by George Bull (London: Penguin rev. edn 1999), Introduction, p.xxii.

beast and half man, is that a prince must know how to act according to the nature of both, and that he cannot survive otherwise.

So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he must learn from the fox and the lion because the lion is defenceless against traps and a fox is defenceless against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves.³³⁸

Alonso's 'monstrous' guilt lies in his willingness to aid Antonio's seizure of power in order to extend his own sphere of influence, a piece of cynical opportunism which, with its sequel, Antonio's plan to replace his former ally with his brother, recalls a similarly unedifying episode in Milano-Neapolitan history recounted in *The Prince*:

After the death of Duke Filippo, the Milanese hired Francesco Sforza to soldier for them against the Venetians; and when he had defeated the enemy at Caravaggio he joined forces with them in order to subjugate his employers, the Milanese themselves. Sforza, his father, after being hired by Queen Joanna of Naples, deserted her without warning and left her defenceless; so to save her kingdom she was compelled to throw herself on the mercy of the King of Aragon.³³⁹

The dialogue in which Antonio broaches his projected act of treachery is an object-lesson in *realpolitik*.

Antonio:

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon
If he were that which now he's like -- that's dead;
Whom I with this obedient steel, three inches of it,
Can lay to bed for ever; whiles you, doing thus,
To the perpetual wink for aye might put
This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who
Should not upbraid our course. For all the rest,

³³⁸ Machiavelli, p.56.

³³⁹ Machiavelli, p.41.

They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;
 They'll tell the clock to any business that
 We say befits the hour.

Sebastian:

Thy case, dear friend,
 Shall be my precedent. As thou got'st Milan,
 I'll come by Naples. Draw thy sword. One stroke
 Shall free thee from the tribute which thou payest
 And I the king shall love thee.

[*The Tempest* 2.1.285-299]

The whole exchange is conducted in Machiavellian terms. *The Prince*, as Martines points out, 'confronted the problem of relations between men and events, between will and Fortune (*fortuna*), between what is and what men desire and can accomplish.'³⁴⁰ Antonio's opening gambit is, 'what thou shouldst be th'occasion speaks thee [...]' (2.1.212) and he concludes his argument with the question, 'how does your content | tender your own good fortune?' (2.1.275). Success, in Machiavelli's terms, depends not merely on fortune but on *virtu*, the capacity to take control of events: Antonio chides Sebastian for lacking this vital quality when he says 'Ebbing men, indeed | Most often do so near the bottom run | By their own fear or sloth' (2.1.231-232). He reassures his co-conspirator that Adrian and Francisco will accept their version of events, echoing Machiavelli's assertion that 'men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived'³⁴¹. Finally, Antonio's dismissal of 'conscience' (2.1.280) as an irrelevance accords with Machiavelli's assumption that in statecraft what is right is whatever is most effective. In this

³⁴⁰ Martines, p.436.

³⁴¹ Machiavelli, p.57.

context, the word 'love' is peculiarly ironic; in the lexicon of Machiavellian politics, this denotes a purely temporary conjunction of interests, subject to the vagaries of '*fortuna*' and the tactical demands of expediency.

Antonio and his confederates may be described as voluntary monsters. Moral centaurs, they have chosen 'to make a nice use of the beast and the man'³⁴². Prospero too is a hybrid, a human prince, exile, father, brother and master endowed with godlike powers. The ambiguity of his status is revealed in two significant exchanges, one with his daughter near the beginning of the play and one, towards the end, with Ariel: lamenting the supposed fate of the king's ship, Miranda cries:

Had I been any god of power I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her [1.2.10-13];

in the final scene, describing the plight of the spellbound courtiers, Ariel forces his master to confront his own human invulnerability:

Ariel:

Your charm so strongly works ‘em
That if you now beheld them your affectations
Would become tender.

Prospero:

Dost thou think so, spirit?

Ariel:

Mine would, sir, were I human.

Prospero:

And mine shall.

³⁴² Machiavelli, p.56.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch of feeling
 Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
 One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
 Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
 [5.1.17-24]

These lines mark a turning-point for Prospero, highlighted by the chiming half-rhyme, 'affections | afflictions'. Usually compassion arises from recognition of the reality of another's feelings; here Prospero is moved by Ariel's description of his prisoners' sufferings to acknowledge his own capacity for 'passion'. The key word in this passage is 'human'; placed immediately before the caesura in a shared line, it resonates strongly in the theatre with, as Peter Holland suggests, '[a] sense of loss or yearning in Ariel's lack of affections'³⁴³ and, on Prospero's part, a sad awareness of the cost of fully acknowledging his humanity, the loss of the magic powers that have set him apart from other men and the return to his dukedom 'where | Every third thought shall be [his] grave' (5.1.314).

As painful as the surrender of his art is the forgiveness of Antonio. Despite their mutual antipathy, the brothers are more alike than they admit, a point which Peter Hall seems to have noted in his National Theatre production of which Robert Cushman wrote: 'One parallel stands out over all; in his ducal gown Prospero is a dead ringer for his usurping brother Antonio, who emerges far more than Caliban, as the play's negative pole'³⁴⁴. After all, both have made themselves monstrous in their search for power, the former aspiring to

³⁴³ Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares* p.172.

³⁴⁴ Cushman, *Observer*, 10 March 1974, in Gielgud, p.130.

god-head, the latter simulating the fox and the lion. It is one thing to acknowledge kinship, however, quite another to achieve reconciliation, and Antonio's silent response to Prospero's decidedly grudging expression of forgiveness does not bode well for their future relations. In Hall's production, according to Cushman, 'one glance between the brothers at the end establishes them as eternally unreconcilable'.³⁴⁵ Although Robin Phillips at Stratford Ontario in 1976 made his Antonio kneel before his brother, clearly 'a profoundly penitent man',³⁴⁶ most directors have interpreted the conclusion of *The Tempest* more pessimistically. In Clifford Williams' 1978 R.S.C. production, for instance, 'Antonio broke away from Prospero without [...] offering even so much as a perfunctory bow, and for the remainder of the play he kept himself apart from those participating in the developing reconciliation between Naples and Milan',³⁴⁷ and though in John Barton's 1970 production for the same company he 'responded to Prospero's words requiring 'my dukedom of thee' by giving him the badge of office [...] there was no sign of any penitence or any resolve to do good in the future'.³⁴⁸ Jonathan Miller's staging of this scene at the Old Vic, emphasising the political as well as the personal dimensions of the exiled duke's resumption of power, was particularly interesting:

Alonso removed a ring from his finger and gave it to Prospero as he told him, 'thy dukedom I resign'. That 'thy' conveyed his abandonment of Antonio, and when Antonio stared in dismayed surprise at him, the king who had been his partner in the conspiracy to unseat Prospero and make Milan subject to

³⁴⁵ Cushman, *Observer*, 10 March 1974, in Gielgud, p.130.

³⁴⁶ McGuire, p.194.

³⁴⁷ McGuire, p.193.

³⁴⁸ McGuire, p.193.

Naples turned away. After Prospero expressed forgiveness and required 'My dukedom' from him, Antonio hesitated perceptibly, assessing the realignment of power that had just occurred then, kneeling, kissed the ring his brother now wore. Rising to his feet following that gesture of submission to his brother's authority and Alonso's, Antonio again looked at his erstwhile partner, who avoided his gaze. As the stage cleared following the Epilogue, Prospero and Antonio were the last to leave, and before passing from view, the two brothers exchanged a long wary stare.³⁴⁹

The image of the Machiavel deserted by his former confederate is a powerful and telling commentary on the contrast between alliances based on expediency and those grounded in justice and mutual respect. However, perhaps the most satisfactory way of dealing with the meeting between the deposed duke and his usurper is that adopted in Nicholas Hytner's production at Stratford, in which John Wood, as Prospero, 'struggled to bring himself to kiss Antonio, who, holding himself motionless was unmoved by and unresponsive to that gesture [...]',³⁵⁰ a simple but striking illustration of the difference between the brothers' willingness to learn from their experiences. Prospero, as we have seen, responded to Ariel's prompting by relinquishing his power and taking his rightful place in human society; Antonio, it would seem, when power is wrested from him, cannot accept his altered status: ironically, the confirmed Machiavellian appears to have forgotten his mentor's precept, 'the one who adapts his policy to the times prospers, and [...] the one whose policy clashes with the demands of the times does not'.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ McGuire, pp.193-194.

³⁵⁰ McGuire, p.193.

³⁵¹ Machiavelli, p.80.

As Ann Barton points out, Prospero's magic has its limits; 'what [it] cannot do is, significantly, the one thing that matters most: to alter the nature and inclinations of the human heart'.³⁵² Antonio and Sebastian 'refuse to be absorbed into any final harmony'.³⁵³ Even the vision of the harpy leaves them apparently unmoved, merely breathing defiance of the 'fiend' (3.3.103). Alonso, however, already chastened by his son's supposed death, does 'suffer a sea change' (1.2.403) and repent of his crimes after hearing Ariel's denunciation:

You are three men of sin, whom destiny --
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in't -- the never-surfeited sea
Hath caused to belch up you, and in this island
Where man doth not inhabit, you 'mongst men
Being most unfit to live. [3.3.53-58]

The tortuous syntax of these opening lines enforces concentration on the disparate terms of reference in which the speech is framed. 'Men of sin' introduces the Christian concept of repentance and amendment of life made explicit in the concluding words of the speech. However, 'Destiny' and subsequent references to 'Fate' and 'the powers' imply that ultimate justice resides not with the Christian God but with some impersonal force or forces governing men's lives. Finally, the harpy's description of the guilty trio as 'unfit to live ... 'mongst men' seems to be an allusion to Aristotle's *Politics* and specifically to his assertion that 'man is by nature a political animal [and] anyone who by his nature and not simply by ill-luck has no state is either too

³⁵² Barton ed., *The Tempest*, p.28.

³⁵³ Barton ed., *The Tempest*, p.39.

bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman'.³⁵⁴ Whether Prospero's isolation in the island should be regarded as 'ill-luck' or whether it, too, is a punishment for anti-social behaviour is open to question. By his account it was 'providence divine' which rescued him from Antonio's perfidy, but his version of the events which led to his exile is not totally convincing; the convoluted syntax seems to reflect the mental contortions required to justify his neglect of public duty in the pursuit of private gratification:

My brother and thy uncle called that a brother Antonio --
 I pray thee mark me, should
 Be so perfidious - he whom next thyself
 Of all the world I loved, and to him put
 The manage of my state - as at that time
 Through all the signories it was the first,
 And Prospero the prime duke - being so reputed
 In dignity, and for the liberal arts
 Without a parallel - this being all my study,
 The government I cast upon my brother, And to my state grew
 Stranger, being transported
 And rapt in secret studies. Thy false uncle -
 [...] Being once perfected how to grant suits,
 How to deny them [...]
 [...] set all hearts i'th' state
 To what tune pleased his ear, that now he was
 The ivy which had hid my princely trunk
 And sucked my verdure out on't.
 [1.2.66-89]

'Transported' and 'rapt' suggest a state of mind amounting to obsession and 'secret studies' has ominous overtones: as the Cambridge editor comments, 'it is an open question whether Prospero's studies exceed the permissible "liberal arts" of which he earlier spoke'.³⁵⁵ However, the most significant words in this

³⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. by T.A. Sinclair rev. by Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1981) p.59.

³⁵⁵ *The Tempest*, ed. by David Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.101.

speech are ‘to my state grew stranger’ which again seem to allude to *The Politics* and to the question posed in Book VII, ‘which life is more desirable, the life of participation in the work of the state and constitution, or one *like a foreigner’s*, cut off from the association of the state’.³⁵⁶ Though Aristotle comes to the conclusion that a contemplative life dedicated to ‘thinking and speculation [is justified when] the aim in such thinking is to do well’, he also asserts that ‘every state is an association’³⁵⁷ and, by dissociating himself from his subjects, Prospero betrays them to the ‘evil nature’ of Antonio (1.2.94). It is arguable, then, in Aristotle’s terms, that in striving to make himself ‘superhuman’, Prospero has unfitted himself to fulfil his role in society. He has ceased to be ‘a political animal’ and hence, according to Aristotle, to be fully human.

Prospero claims that ‘[his] library | Was dukedom large enough’, (1.2.109-110), expressing a yearning for a solipsistic sovereignty in a community of one which is later echoed by Caliban, lamenting his former solitary state:

I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king [...].
[1.2.343-344]

In their equation of autonomy with freedom from social ties, it would seem that the godlike magus and the ‘image of man [...] half merged with the animal’³⁵⁸ are brothers under the skin. Caliban is the only character in *The*

³⁵⁶ Aristotle, p.395 (my emphasis).

³⁵⁷ Aristotle, p.54.

³⁵⁸ Barton ed., *The Tempest*, p.42.

Tempest directly referred to and addressed as ‘monster’ - though, as we have seen, the word is first used in connection with Antonio - and the nature and degree of his monstrosity are crucial to any critical or theatrical interpretation of the play. On stage, Prospero’s slave has appeared in a variety of guises. Benson’s performance has been described as ‘a Darwinian missing link’,³⁵⁹ whom John Gielgud remembered ‘hang[ing] from a tree with a fish in his mouth’.³⁶⁰ Gielgud also recalled ‘an old actor called Louis Calvert [...] dressed in a kind of animal skin and walk[ing] about on all fours like a pantomime bear’.³⁶¹ Audrey Williamson found Richard Burton’s Caliban ‘an amiable monster with mesmeric eyes in a very black face - but monster wholly, with no real sense of the pity of the tethered human nature beneath the surface’.³⁶² On the other hand, David Troughton for the RSC in 1993 and Jasper Britton at the Globe in 2000 were unequivocally human. Perhaps the most interesting attempt in recent years to present Caliban as a truly monstrous hybrid was Dennis Quilley’s performance, praised by Irving Wardle as ‘the most original in [Peter Hall’s] production’ at the National Theatre: ‘His makeup is bisected: on one half the ugly scrofulous monster whom Prospero sees, on the other an image of the noble savage and, as Mr Quilley plays him, he is striving to break from the first stage into the second’.³⁶³

I would contend that, in the terms of this thesis, Caliban is no more and no less

³⁵⁹ Orgel ed., *The Tempest*, p.73.

³⁶⁰ Gielgud, p.95.

³⁶¹ Gielgud, p.95.

³⁶² Audrey Williamson, *Old Vic Drama 2: 1947-1951* (London: Rockliff, 1957), p.160.

³⁶³ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 2 March 1974, in Gielgud, p.127.

monstrous than Prospero and Antonio, in that all three represent human nature at the point where it merges with the non-human. Like Antonio's, his nature combines human and animal elements; with Prospero, he illustrates the extremes of human potentiality envisioned by Pico della Mirandola; to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish or to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine. He is clearly, as Richard Bradford asserts, 'a figure with human sensibilities, but with roots at the lower, bestial end of the scale of being'.³⁶⁴ Prospero describes him as 'a freckled whelp, hag-born -- not honoured with | A human shape' (1.2.283-284), yet he wears some form of clothing -- the 'gabardine' under which Trinculo shelters from the rain (2.2.38) and acquires the power of speech. Indeed, as Bradford points out, this 'archetype of ignoble savagery ... speaks only in blank verse, that stylistic symbol of high culture and sophistication'.³⁶⁵ However, in Caliban's case, *oratio* is not accompanied by *ratio*. Instinct, rather than reason, seems to be his guiding principle. Practically the first words he utters are, 'I must eat my dinner' (1.2.332) and though Prospero sees his sexual assault on Miranda as a violation of 'honour', his intention is simply to perpetuate his species:

Would't had been done!
 Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
 This isle with Calibans.
 [1.2.351-353]

In modern terms, he may be seen as Darwinian man, genetically programmed for survival and procreation. As such he can be equated with Aristotle's

³⁶⁴ Richard Bradford, *Stylistics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.125.

³⁶⁵ Bradford: p125

concept of the natural slave:

Whenever there is the same wide discrepancy between human beings as there is between soul and body or between man and beast, then those whose condition is such that their function is the use of their bodies and nothing better can be expected of them, those, I say, are slaves by nature. For the 'slave by nature' is he that can and therefore does belong to another, and he that participates in reason so far as to recognise it but not so as to possess it (whereas the other animals obey not reason but emotions).³⁶⁶

In Aristotle's view, the master-slave relationship works to the advantage of both parties, since 'the slave is in a sense a part of his master, a living but separate part of his body'.³⁶⁷ Prospero seems to refer to this theory in his admission, 'This thing of darkness I | Acknowledge mine' (5.1.278-279) and it appears that, in the past, the relationship had, indeed, been mutually beneficial; as he confesses to Miranda, they rely on Caliban's physical strength:

We cannot miss him. He does make out fire,
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
That profit us. [1.2.313-315]

and at first they had treated him kindly and taught him to 'endow [his] purposes | With words that made them known' (1.2.359-360). His wistful memory of that time depicts a potentially fruitful interchange between 'nature' and 'nurture', between Caliban's instinctive knowledge of the island's

³⁶⁶ Aristotle, pp. 68-69.

³⁶⁷ Aristotle, p.73.

‘qualities’ and Prospero’s, or, more likely, Miranda’s humane desire to better his condition:

When thou cam’st first,

Thou strok’st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
 Water with berries in’t, and teach me how
 To name the bigger light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
 And showed thee all the qualities o’th’ isle,
 The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile [...]
 [1.2.334-340]

This idyll was shattered by the assault on Miranda, but it remains in the audience’s memory as an image of ‘the confrontation of cerebral wisdom and bestial nature’³⁶⁸ curiously reminiscent of Boticelli’s painting of Minerva and the Centaur, even to the detail of the goddess’s gesture of resting her hand gently on the creature’s head, as if she were, indeed, ‘strok[ing]’ him. As Stephen McKnight notes, ‘the centaur is not the wild, uncontrollable beast of conventional depiction; he is subdued, even melancholy[,]. . . a misfit, who is bound to his animalic nature and can only have the remotest glimmerings of what it must be like to be fully human’.³⁶⁹ In passages such as this, and particularly in his rhapsodic account of the ‘sounds and sweet airs’ of the isle, Caliban, too, seems to experience such ‘glimmerings’ (3.2.139). And there is, indeed, something of the centaur in Caliban, not in his appearance but in his actions: the attempted rape of Miranda parallels Nessus’ attempted rape of Deianeira, the interrupted betrothal masque recalls the disruption of the Lapith

³⁶⁸ McKnight, p.93.

³⁶⁹ McKnight, p.94.

wedding-feast, and his uncontrolled behaviour under the influence of Stephano's 'celestial liquor' resembles that of the centaurs of Mount Pholo, maddened by the scent of the wine offered to Heracles. G.S. Kirk believes that centaurs symbolise 'the apparent contradictions between the laws of the jungle and those of the village, between the complex regularities of the natural world and the artificial rules imposed by man, between the freedom of animals and the constraints of society'.³⁷⁰ Caliban's inability to comprehend these constraints, such as the obligation to respect Miranda's 'honour', renders him unfit for life in society, as Antonio is, as Prospero was.

'Society' in *The Tempest*, takes many forms. Indeed, the island seems to serve as a testing-ground for a number of social models. As well as the Aristotelian *oikos* of father-master, child and slave, it can be seen as an image of colonization with Prospero, the settler, appropriating the isle's natural resources - Ariel and the other spirits - and exploiting the indigenous population, Caliban, or as a recapitulation of the political situation in Milan, with Caliban, the 'king' in Prospero's place and Prospero in the role of the usurper Antonio. All these scenarios are parodied in the comic sub-plot involving Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban. By offering 'homage' (1.2.113) in return for Neapolitan aid in an attempt to supplant and murder Prospero, Caliban is re-enacting Antonio's *coup* against his brother. Similarly, Stephano apes Prospero's means of subjugating Caliban, treating him at first with patronising benevolence then overawing him with his supposed divine powers: 'I was the man i'th'moon when time was' (2.2.137-138). Jonathan Bate

³⁷⁰ Kirk, p.209.

suggests a further parallel between the exiled duke and the shipwrecked butler which, if his supposition is correct, casts an unpleasant light on Prospero's early kindness to Caliban:

If 'water with berries' means wine, there is a remarkably close correspondence between Prospero's first exchange with Caliban and that of Stephano and Trinculo: in each case, intoxication is an means of eliciting subservience. It is a familiar story of colonization.³⁷¹

The Neapolitans call Caliban 'monster'; Prospero calls him 'slave'. In both cases his otherness is seen as a sign of inferiority, in accord with Aristotle's interpretation of Euripides: '[...] as the poets say, "It is proper that Greeks should rule non-Greeks; the implication being that non-Greek and slave are by "nature identical"''.³⁷²

One of the most striking models of social organisation in *The Tempest* occurs in the opening scene. The king's ship, with its clear chain of command -- Master, Boatswain and crew - and its strictly defined areas of responsibility - 'the master [...] abaft the mast, the boatswain, and all the common sailors under his command [...] afore the mast'³⁷³ -- is a disciplined, authoritarian society in which identity is determined by function, rather than birth or status, and is fixed and stable, '*semper eadem*'. Indeed, Aristotle uses the image of a ship to exemplify just such a society in Book III of *The Politics*: 'we say a

³⁷¹ Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p.246.

³⁷² Aristotle, p.57.

³⁷³ Monson, quoted in Lindley ed. *The Tempest*, p.91n.

citizen is a member of an association, just as a sailor is, and each member of the crew has his different function and a name to fit it -- rower, helmsman, look-out, and the rest'.³⁷⁴ The two key lines in this scene are 'Tend to th'master's whistle' (1.1.5) and 'What care these roarers for the name of king?' (1.1.15). Whereas in Naples, authority resides with Alonso, here it lies with the Master. David Lindley finds a 'metaphoric link between the chaos in nature and the upsetting of social hierarchy in the Boatswain's speeches'.³⁷⁵ But the storm is not a natural phenomenon, but a product of Prospero's art and it seems to me that what this episode illustrates is the irrelevance of 'social hierarchy' in the differently ordered hierarchy on board ship where, in order to become courtiers, the mariners would have to stop being 'rower, helmsman, lookout, and the rest'.

At the opposite extreme to the disciplined stable microcosm afforded by the ship's crew is the state of benign anarchy, based on a fusion of Ovid's Golden Age and Montaigne's essay 'Of The Cannibals', posited by Gonzalo in his idealistic project for the 'plantation' of the island (2.1.149), a vision of 'soft' primitivism, undermined, for the audience, not only by Caliban but also by the paradox, noted by Sebastian, that Gonzalo 'would be king' of this supposedly 'sovereignless' commonwealth (2.1.162, 153) and by his assumption that this happy state of nature would not exist spontaneously but be brought about by colonial settlement. This inconsistency is entirely appropriate, since the island itself is curiously inconsistent. The air, for instance, 'breathes [...] most

³⁷⁴ Aristotle, p.179.

³⁷⁵ Lindley ed., *The Tempest*, p.93n.

sweetly', according to Adrian (2.1.49-50), yet to Antonio seems 'perfumed by a fen' (2.1.52); Gonzalo finds the grass 'lush and lusty' but to Antonio it looks 'tawny' (2.1.57,59). Who is right? It is ironic that the storm-tossed ship, the conventional emblem, as Lindley points out, of 'the vicissitudes of human life'³⁷⁶ figures, in this most unconventional of plays, as a model of consistency and order whereas *terra firma*, in the form of the island, proves to be a place of change, uncertainty and confusion where even identity is open to question. So Trinculo cannot decide whether Caliban is 'a man or a fish' (2.2.25), Stephano at first thinks Trinculo and Caliban are a four-legged devil (2.2.57-62), Miranda believes Ferdinand is 'a spirit' (1.2.412) and he takes her for a 'goddess' (1.2.424), Alonso is unsure whether Prospero is indeed the Duke of Milan or 'some enchanted trifle to abuse [him]' (5.1.114) and he and all his shipwrecked court experience 'Some subtleties o'th'isle that will not let [them] | Believe things certain' (5.1.126-127). The embodiment of this 'subtlet[y]' is -- yet another paradox -- the disembodied spirit, Ariel, who, as Ann Barton reminds us, is visible only when he is in disguise:

It is hard to distinguish his true identity behind the multitude of disguises in which he manifests himself: as the fiery phenomenon of the storm, the nymph of the sea, the harpy, the goddess Ceres, the disembodied voice. Air is his element; he becomes palpable only as a concession to human power.³⁷⁷

It is Prospero's power - his magic 'art' - which commands the airy protean monster, Ariel, just as it controls the cthonic hybrid monster, Caliban. But, as

³⁷⁶ Lindley ed. *The Tempest*, p.6.

³⁷⁷ Bartpm ed. *The Tempest*, p.47.

we have seen, this magic power is made manifest to the audience through the power of theatre in such set-pieces as the storm, the masque and the harpy banquet. In addition, the island is an arena for power-politics, as the action of the play continues and concludes the history of Milanese-Neapolitan relations which began with Antonio's seizure of power and will conclude with the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. In so far as *The Tempest* has a plot, this is it, though much of the action has already happened before the play begins and lies 'in the dark backward and abyss of time' (1.2.50) and its final stage lies in the future, in the reunion of the two states in the next generation. 'Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue | Should become kings of Naples?' Gonzalo asks, (5.1.208-209) and goes on to wonder at the providential outcome of events:

in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis
And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
Where he himself was lost.
[5.1.211-213]

The allusion to the Tunisian marriage reminds us that the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda, though unquestionably a love match, is also a dynastic union. Indeed, Stephen Orgel sees it as Prospero's master-stroke:

Miranda's marriage is brought about by the magic; for all the evident pain of losing his daughter, her betrothal to Ferdinand is part of Prospero's plan. It pleases Miranda, certainly, but it is designed by Prospero as a way of satisfying himself. Claribel's marriage to the King of Tunis looks less sinister in this light: daughters' marriages, in royal families at least, are arranged primarily to please their fathers. And leaving the island, reassuming the dukedom, is part of the plan too. Both of these

are presented as acts of renunciation, but they are in fact what the exercise of Prospero's magic is intended to effect, and they represent his triumph.³⁷⁸

Orgel seems to overestimate the power of Prospero's magic here. As Ann Barton points out, though he 'can freeze Ferdinand in his tracks [and] can charm his nerves and sword, [...] he cannot make him fall in love with Miranda'.³⁷⁹

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda is clearly part of Prospero's 'project' (Epilogue 12) but, as I hope to show, it is also an important element in Shakespeare's design in *The Tempest*. Their first meeting is charged with significance. Each at first thinks the other is superhuman: Miranda says of Ferdinand, 'I might call him | A thing divine' (1.2.420-421) whilst he assumes that she is 'the goddess | On whom [Ariel's] airs attend' (1.2.424-425). But two further exchanges reveal a mutual recognition which suggests a profound affinity between them. Ferdinand's first speech to Miranda concludes with the lines:

My prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is O you wonder --
If you be maid or no?
[1.2.428-430]

³⁷⁸ Orgel ed. *The Tempest*, pp. 52-53.

³⁷⁹ Barton ed. *The Tempest*, p.28.

The word 'maid' betrays a response to Miranda's humanity, and the title by which he addresses her, 'wonder', is a form of her own name. The dialogue between Miranda and her father which preceded this passage is equally telling:

Miranda:

What is't? A spirit?

Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,
It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.

Prospero:

No, wench, it eats and sleeps, and hath such senses
As we have, such.

[1.2.412-414]

Of course, Miranda is only partly wrong and her father is only partly right: as a human being, Ferdinand has a dual nature, both spiritual and corporeal. In other words, he represents the perfect balance between Prospero's quasi-divinity and Caliban's bestiality and it is his humanity which appeals to Miranda's own humanity, prompting her reply to his greeting, 'No wonder, sirs, | But certainly a maid' (1.2.480-481).

Frank Kermode, who sees *The Tempest* as a pastoral tragicomedy 'affording the opportunity for a very complex comparison between the worlds of Art and Nature,³⁸⁰ regards Ferdinand as the antithesis of Caliban, the embodiment, in Bernheimer's phrase, of 'the ability to restrain appetite for the sake of a civilized ideal'.³⁸¹ I would argue, however, that the Prince of Naples acts as a

³⁸⁰ *The Tempest*, ed. by Frank Kermode, (London and New York: Methuen, pb. edn, 1980), Introduction, p.xiii.

³⁸¹ R. Bernheimer, 'Wild Men in the Middle Ages', quoted in Kermode ed. *The Tempest*, p.xiii.

foil to all three of the ‘monstrous’ figures in *The Tempest*. By setting him the task of log-bearing and lecturing him on pre-marital continence, Prospero seems to be equating him with Caliban, but his response to this treatment which, as David Lindley notes, ‘neatly explores the bodily servitude of [this] “wooden slavery” [...] and the willing service of his heart to Miranda’³⁸² reveals a cultivated sensibility, combining, as it does, courtly rhetoric with tender feeling:

There be some sports are painful, and their labour
 Delight in them sets off. Some kinds of baseness
 Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
 Point to rich ends. This my mean task
 Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
 The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead,
 And makes my labours pleasures.

[3.1.1-7]

The measured antitheses -- ‘sports’/ ‘labour’; ‘painful’/ ‘delight’; ‘baseness’/ ‘noble’; ‘poor’/ ‘rich’; ‘quickens’/ ‘dead’; ‘labours’/ ‘pleasures’ -- reveal a mind capable of balanced judgement and a spirit which cannot be subdued by external circumstances. Moreover, as Stephen Orgel points out, ‘the crimes Prospero charges Ferdinand with [...] are those of his brother Antonio: usurpation and treason’;³⁸³ yet he is the means by which the wrongs done by Antonio are righted and Miranda, heiress to the Dukedom of Milan, becomes the future Queen of Naples. Finally, Ferdinand is presented as a contrast to Prospero himself. His response to his first sight of Miranda is an allusion to Aeneas’s greeting to Venus in *Aeneid* Book I:

³⁸² Lindley ed. *The Tempest*, p.75.

³⁸³ Orgel ed. *The Tempest*, p.29.

O -- quam te memorem, virgo? Namque haud tibi vultus
mortalis, nec vox huminem sonat; O dea certe!

By what name should I call thee, O maiden? for thy face is not
mortal nor has thy voice a human ring; O goddess surely!³⁸⁴

Aeneas is, of course, the pre-eminent example of the sacrifice of personal happiness to public duty, a quality which Prospero signally failed to exercise as Duke of Milan. However, the Ferdinand/ Aeneas parallel has another significance. As Jupiter prophesies to Venus at the beginning of the *Aeneid*, its hero is destined to found a mighty state which will usher in a new world order, an era of peace and stability known to later generations as the *pax Augusta*:

aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis; cana Fides et Vesta,
Remo cum fratre Quirinius iura dabunt; dirae ferro et
compagibus artis claudentur Belli portae, ...

Then shall wars cease and the rough ages soften; hoary Faith
and Vesta, Quirinius with his brother Remus shall give laws.
The gates of war, grim with iron and close-fitting bars, shall be
closed.³⁸⁵

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda will also initiate a period of harmony; Alonso will cease to be Prospero's 'inveterate [...] enemy (1.2.121-122) and Milan's 'coronet [will no longer be] subject to [the] crown of Naples' (1.2.114). And Gonzalo's blessing on the betrothed couple invokes a celestial

³⁸⁴ *Aeneid*. I 327-328.

³⁸⁵ *Aeneid*, I 291-294.

sanction for the new regime which recalls Jupiter's promise of protection for
 'the Latin race, the lords of Alba, and the walls of lofty Rome'.³⁸⁶

Look down, you gods,
 And on this couple drop a blessed crown,
 For it is you that have chalked forth the way
 Which brought us hither. 5.1.204-207]

Warde Fowler sums up the moral of the *Aeneid* in these words: 'what has been won by *virtus* must be preserved by *pietas*, by the sense of duty in family and state'³⁸⁷ The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda represents the harmonising of public and private virtue, of love and politics symbolized by their 'discovery' in Act V playing chess. As Orgel points out, this was 'an aristocratic pastime associated especially with lovers'³⁸⁸ but, as a contest of strategy in which the opposed sets of pieces are known as 'armies', it is also suggestive of warfare and diplomacy, and their affectionate badinage gently mocks the chicanery of Machiavellian *realpolitik*.

Miranda:	Sweet lord, you play me false.
Ferdinand:	No, my dearest love, I would not for the world.
Miranda:	Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, And I would call it fair play. [5.1.174-178]

³⁸⁶ *Aeneid* I 6-7.

³⁸⁷ W. Warde Fowler, *Aeneas at the Site of Rome: Observations on the Eighth Book of the Aeneid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), p.254.

³⁸⁸ Orgel, ed. *The Tempest*, p.197n.

Philip Brockbank sees the chess-game as 'a proper symbol of comedy -- a conflict transposed into play'³⁸⁹ but it also has something of the allegorical force of a masque. A Catalan manuscript, *Scachi d'Amor* describes a chess game between Venus and Mars, each represented by a human player.³⁹⁰ When Prospero draws aside the curtain of his cell, are we meant to see a similar pair of contrasted but complementary figures: Nature and Culture, perhaps, or Love and Duty -- or simply Milan and Naples? The episode has something of the quality of a play-within-a-play. Like Claudius at 'The Mousetrap', Prospero and Alonso watch their youthful substitutes performing a formalized version of their own past histories. And the chess game itself is both a kind of drama, with the pieces as characters, and an emblem of the action of the play as a whole, 'a contest of ape and essence for possession of a man's soul, played out like a master game of chess'.³⁹¹ With its receding levels of reality -- theatre audience, onstage spectators, players (in both senses) and chessmen -- the episode seems to encapsulate the peculiar magic of *The Tempest*, its 'bewildering superimposition of illusion upon illusion'.³⁹²

This play constantly confronts us with the question: what is real? From the opening scene, when a storm which the audience has accepted as a theatrical convention representing a reality within the dramatic fiction turns out to be an illusion created by a magician (who is, of course, himself fictitious), to the

³⁸⁹ Philip Brockbank, 'The Tempest', in *Later Shakespeare*, ed. by John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 8 (London: Arnold, 1966), p.201.

³⁹⁰ William Hartston, *The Guinness Book of Chess Grandmasters*, (Enfield : Guinness Publishing, 1996), p.11.

³⁹¹ John Southworth, *Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), pp. 271-272.

³⁹² Barton ed. *The Tempest*, p.48.

Epilogue which, as we have seen, appears to extend the world of the play into the real world, the stage is 'not only the vehicle to which [Shakespeare] entrusts his own perception of reality [but] ... itself the object of reflection and representation'.³⁹³ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the betrothal masque, when Prospero terminates the performance with a speech which conflates the illusion of the spirit show and the fiction of *The Tempest* with the world outside the theatre, the world to which the audience will shortly return:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

[4.1.148-158]

The speech embraces four kinds of being, operating on four levels of reality: the spirit performers in the masque, the human characters in *The Tempest*, the actors who play these characters and the audience, but, on closer examination, these categories begin to blur; *The Tempest* itself is a kind of 'vision'; the 'spirits' are actually human actors; and as audience at the masque, Prospero, Miranda and Ferdinand have shared the experience of the spectators in the theatre. So the 'we' who are the stuff of dreams seems to include both the fictitious persons of the play and the real human beings, onstage and off, who

³⁹³ Lombardo, p.143.

have been brought together by its performance. Ann Barton describes the destabilizing effect of these lines in her introduction to the Penguin edition:

The reality of life beyond the confines of the island, and also of life outside the doors of the theatre, is here equated with the transitory existence of the play-within-a-play. It is no more solid than, no different from, that tissue of illusion which has just vanished so completely, dissolved into nothingness at the bidding of Prospero.³⁹⁴

The equation of the outside world with the world of the theatre works in two ways: by diminishing the significance of the 'real' world - the 'great globe' - it enhances the significance of the playhouse -- the great Globe.

The first two recorded performances of *The Tempest* took place at Court (in 1611 and 1613)³⁹⁵ and Andrew Gurr has argued persuasively that it was Shakespeare's first play written specifically for the Blackfriars³⁹⁶ but it is hard to resist the assumption that there were also performances in the King's Men's 'public' theatre and that these lines had a particular resonance in that setting. Like Hamlet, in the 'what a piece of work is a man' speech discussed in Chapter I, Prospero is drawing on the familiar trope of the *theatrum mundi*, an image to which the Globe theatre, with its circular shape, its 'heavens' and its emblem of Hercules bearing the world on his shoulders gave material form. 'All the world's a stage', says Jacques (*As You Like It* 2.7.139) quoting the theatre's motto, 'Totus mundus agit histrionem'. In *The Tempest* the stage seems to encompass the whole world, as the audience's 'reality' is equated

³⁹⁴ Barton, ed. *The Tempest*, p.49.

³⁹⁵ Lindley, ed. *The Tempest*, p.1.

³⁹⁶ Lindley, ed. *The Tempest*, p.4.

with the 'reality' of the play. Leslie Fiedler's assertion that the theatre 'represents always and everywhere an attempt to mitigate, if not bridge the mythological gap which men feel between themselves and the other, whoever that may be'³⁹⁷ seems particularly true of this play. Like Prospero, we must acknowledge our kinship with Caliban -- and also with Prospero himself, with the wily Antonio, the kindly Gonzalo, the fools and the lovers and the conscience-stricken Alonso. Shakespeare's plays also bridge the gap between different aspects of the self: human and animal, human and divine, male and female, body and spirit, actor and role. For Shakespeare, writes Marion Bodwell Smith, 'the happy man is he who in learning to know and accept his own dualities has learned to know and accept the world'.³⁹⁸ As I hope this thesis has shown, Shakespeare helps us to confront our own dualities, to accept the 'mutuality and contradiction' -- the protean monsters and the monstrous hybrids -- inherent in human nature.

³⁹⁷ Leslie A. Fielder, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (St.Albans: Paladin, 1974), p.39.

³⁹⁸ Bodwell Smith, p.20.

Conclusion

In her survey of the intellectual and cultural background to late sixteenth and early seventeenth century literature, *This Stage-Play World*, Julia Briggs comments on the changing fashions in literary criticism:

Different generations inevitably recognise what they are predisposed to understand; recent critics have correspondingly found hitherto unglimped complexities, ironies and ambiguities, a sense of personality as discontinuous. In all such responses can be seen evident reflections of our own predicament; a degree of cultural determinism is inescapable, but need not lead inevitably to drastic oversimplification.³⁹⁹

This is clearly true of our response to Shakespeare. His plays “hold [---] a mirror up to nature; [*Hamlet*: 3.2.22] when we look into that mirror, we cannot fail to see ourselves.

Our own age is preoccupied with the idea of the self. Biologists, neurologists, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers are extending our understanding of the relationship between brain and mind, experience and consciousness, genetic predisposition and social conditioning, the ways in which each one of us is both the same as and different from other human beings and the ways in which, as a species, we are both the same as and different from other animals. Meanwhile, in terms of popular culture, our readiness to resort to plastic

³⁹⁹ Briggs, pp. 7-8.

surgery and psycho-therapeutic counselling, the proliferation of diets and exercise regimes and the buoyant sales of self-help manuals testify to our faith in the possibility of reinventing ourselves in accordance with current ideas of normality or perfection.

The image of human nature, which emerges from Shakespeare's plays is also grounded in ideas of duality and change. Characters are presented as hybrids, like Othello struggling to reconcile reason and passion, or as undergoing transformation, like Bottom and Falstaff, or as protean shapeshifters, like Rosalind/Ganymede. Above all, Shakespeare explores the transgression of boundaries, between the self and the other, in his pairs of identical twins, between male and female in his transvestite heroines, between rational and bestial in Antonio and Caliban. Humanity, he seems to suggest, is not definable in terms of either/or. Like the monstrous figure of Actaeon in Salomon's engraving, it is both/and.

As we saw in Chapter I of this thesis, Hamlet defines man as an anomalous creature, "in apprehension [...] like a god" [2.2.308] and yet, "the quintessence of dust" [2.2.300], inhabiting a "sterile promontory" [2.2.300], which seems to stand not merely for the earth but for the level of human existence, with the unreachable heavens above and the unfathomable sea before him. A little over a century after Shakespeare's death, another great English poet used a rather similar image to convey the curious contrarities of human nature:

Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
 A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
 With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
 With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
 He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
 In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
 In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
 Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
 Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
 Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
 Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
 Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
 Created half to rise, and half to fall;
 Great Lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
 Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
 The glory, jest and riddle of the world!⁴⁰⁰

Pope, the great master of antithesis, sees man in antithetical terms. However, Shakespeare's most characteristic poetic devices are the metaphor and the pun. In metaphor, reality is transformed into something else whilst remaining itself; in a pun, meanings collide and coalesce so that two ideas become one. Shakespeare's approach to character betrays a similar habit of mind. The metamorphosed Bottom, for instance, is a kind of living metaphor or animated pun, as Charles and Michelle Martindale recognise:

One could argue, on a crude level, that Bottom's character as an ass is confirmed by this physical transformation. But [---] Bottom is far too richly characterised to be merely an embodiment of asininity. During his period of change (about which he understands little) he remains glorious by himself, ridiculous, vain, cocksure, ebullient, kindly, an inspirer of affection in others, a source of life and delight.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Man', in *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope* ed. by Adolphus William Ward (London : Macmillan, 1961), p.201.

⁴⁰¹ Martindale, pp. 65-66.

Bottom, like the other characters considered in this thesis, enlarges our perception of what we mean by ‘the self’. At the beginning of the play, he is an absurd hybrid of weaver and aspiring actor, convinced of his ability to play all the parts in the mechanicals’ play. Metamorphosed by Puck, he becomes a comic Actaeon, doted on by the bewitched Titania as her ‘gentle joy’ [4.14] and her ‘sweet love’ [4.1.30]. Finally, as Pyramus, he attains the height of his artistic anihilation as star performer, romantic lover and tragic hero. The ‘tedious brief scene of Young Pyramus/And his love Thisbe’ [5.1.56-57] may be a theatrical fiasco in the eyes of the audience, both on stage and off, but for Bottom it is the realisation of his highest aspirations, and indeed, as Peter Holland notes, in Adrian Noble’s 1994 R.S.C. production, Desmond Barrit ‘played [Pyramus’ death-scene] so movingly that Hippolyta cried at the sight’.⁴⁰²

Leslie Fiedler argues that ‘play acting, the theatre itself, represents always and everywhere an attempt to mitigate, if not bridge, the mythological gap which men feel between themselves and the other—[and] acting is [---] no mere matter of imitating another individual---but of metamorphosing into another kind’.⁴⁰³ Through his dramatic exploration of the transgressive, the fluid, the unclassifiable elements in humanity – what this thesis has defined as the monstrous – Shakespeare questions the nature of this ‘mythological gap’ and extends our perception of the human.

⁴⁰² Holland, *English Shakespeares*, p.188.

⁴⁰³ Fiedler, p.39.

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